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# The Pacific Journal of Theology

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of Theological Schools (SPATS)

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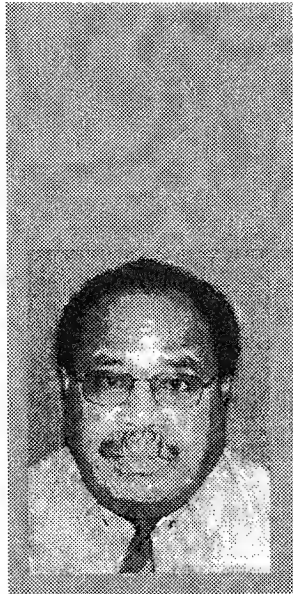
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## Editorial

Over the past fifteen to twenty years the Melanesian group had been singled out as the sub-region of Oceania needing more attention. Most of the attention focused on Melanesia was directed to the political, cultural as well as economic and religious upheaval of the region. From Bougainville to the Solomon Islands and to the Fiji Islands, political unrests and difficult ethnic problems marked the last two decades. It had been a disturbed area of Oceania.

In spite of the difficulty faced, the Melanesian sub-region had been trying to address its issues in many ways. In October 2004, a Melanesian Contextual Theology Conference was held in the Solomon Islands, (the second in two years for Melanesia) to highlight what they could do to address the situation theologically. The theme of the Conference – “Justice, Peace and Love in the Context of Melanesia” tried to reflect on how Melanesian communities wrestled with their situation. The contents of this issue are mainly related to the Solomon Islands ethnic tensions and only generally touching other parts



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Banivanua**

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of the Melanesian sub-region like Vanuatu, Fiji and Papua New Guinea.

The papers presented in this issue have tried to address the situation in a way that speaks to the people and also pave a way of doing theology contextually, as Bishop Terry Brown's writing has tried to encourage.

For some years, SPATS has been trying to help the Pacific region through its member theological colleges and seminaries to reflect critically in the light of their understanding of the triune God portrayed in scriptures, on the situations faced by the people. Some of the earlier issues of the Pacific Journal of Theology have touched on similar contextual issues from other sub-regions of Oceania. The first paper by Bishop Brown argues that contextual theology should be spelled out clearly as "Christian" Contextual Theology to differentiate it from other contexts. He argued that Christian contextual theology must deal with what is real rather than idealizing a situation and in that process suppressing reality.

Through his "hermeneutical circle" the author has tried to reflect on some of the real stories and how they were interpreted during the ethnic tension period. The point that the author has made here is important, since in some circles, interpreting the scripture to enable contextual stories to be "scriptural" is a common problem for some contextual approaches to theology. Bishop Brown's article is a definition of what Christian Contextual Theology is and it has paved the way for other articles that followed. The second paper has tried to define the meaning of justice, peace and love in the context of Melanesia, especially in cultural issues such as "compensation" and "shell money". This was seen in relation to the biblical notion of love, justice and peace. A moving story follows and this is accompanied by "lessons learnt from the story" as seen from the Melanesian Brotherhood point of view in terms of peace-making in the Solomon Islands, are the third and fourth papers. The involvement of the Brotherhood was an attempt

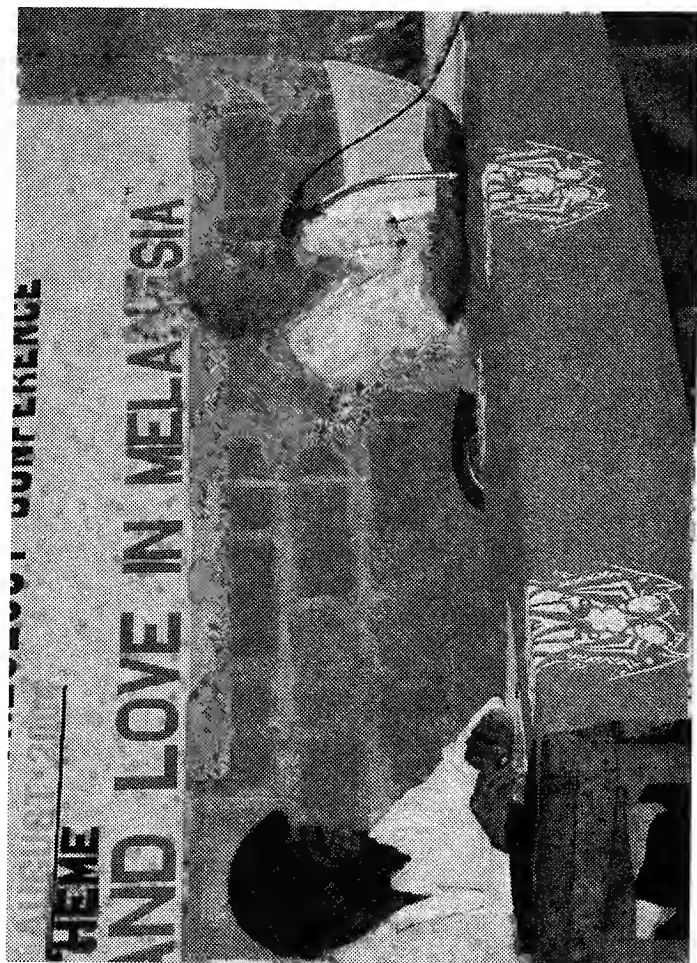




from their Order and the Church of Melanesia to bring back normalcy. The commitment and dedication of this religious order that resulted in the brutal murder of seven brothers was one of the greatest strengths of the Christian churches involvement, during and after the ethnic tension period. The cost of bringing back peace and normalcy to the Melanesian Brotherhood and to the Church as a whole was great.

The last paper is an interesting one; the importance of pigs as an element of sacrifice has its origin in Melanesia according to the author, but it could be said that the issues raised in the paper have some resemblance in Polynesia as well. "Behold, the Pig of God: Mystery of Christ's Sacrifice in the Contexts of Melanesia, Oceania" is a well researched paper, challenging theologians in the region to keep digging deep for new issues and ideas from Oceania that could enhance our common search for a Christian Contextual Theology in the region.

The three book reviews touched on three different but related themes Globalization, Pluralism and HIV/AIDS. Globalization is seen as a way of glossing over particularity of issues and pluralism emphasizing not only cultural but religious and the attempts to help Christian Churches to recognize the real contexts that we are in. The author's challenge to the church is to be "God's people in the midst of all God's peoples". The issue of HIV/AIDS of course reflects a particular situation that must be addressed in a particular way.



*The Rt. Rev'd. Dr. Terry Brown and Rev. Charles Beu  
at the Melanesian Contextual Theology Seminar*



# Christian Contextual Theology - A Pacific Example

## *Malaita's 'Sabbath-keeping Anglicans' and the Hermeneutical Circle*

### 1. Introduction

First, I would like to thank the organisers of this Conference for the privilege of addressing you today with some reflections on 'Contextual Theology'. I have been put forward from the Church of Melanesia as a speaker, perhaps because I have had some experience of 'contextual theology' in Canada; but more likely because, though familiar with fairly traditional doctrinal and dogmatic theology in the Eastern and Western traditions, I am still committed to contextual theology; indeed, like many of you, I have been trying to practise it in a Pacific context. Part of this paper will be an attempt to relate contextual theology with more traditional doctrinal theology and Christian Revelation. I shall also give an extended example of Pacific contextual theology and practice from the situation in which I am working.

However, first I would like to state clearly some of my assumptions. When I say 'contextual theology' it is shorthand for 'Christian contextual theology'. I believe



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that what we mean by and are undertaking in 'contextual theology' is *part of our Christian faith and way of life* – not primarily a philosophical (philosophy or phenomenology of religion), social scientific (anthropology, sociology, psychology) or historical (history of religions) approach to religious faith (though these are all important to the enterprise) – *but a faith approach itself*: thinking and reflecting (*logia*) about God (*theos*) in our particular contexts (situations, 'cultures') from the perspective of our Christian faith. From this perspective, orthodoxy (*ortho* = right or correct, *doxia* = giving glory [to God]) and orthopraxis (*ortho* = right or correct, *praxis* = practice or ministry) are *both* very important parts of our Baptismal ministries as Christians; indeed, they sum it up. Therefore, I have entitled this paper 'Christian Contextual Theology' rather than just 'Contextual Theology'.

A further assumption is that Christian faith is a coming together and interaction of historical Christianity (whatever its denominational manifestation); a community with its cultural roots and contemporary realities, local, national and global; and individual personal commitment to both Jesus Christ, Son of God and Messiah, and to the Church, the Body of Christ. Christian faith is not some sort of faith in something separated from or not related to the realities of day-to-day life, whether an individual 'redeemed soul' isolated from the world in some sort of 'pure spiritual realm' (a kind of otherworldly separatist Gnostic redemption) or a 'pure community' ('sect' untouched and in no interaction with the world (as attractive as these alternatives are to some individuals and some groups). While some would mistakenly read John's Gospel in this way (emphasising Jesus's words in his High Priestly Prayer, 'I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world' [17:14]), it is clear that Jesus and his disciples (including ourselves) are *in the world*: 'I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one' [17:15] and 'As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world' [17:18]. Ours is a holistic faith; we are agents and ambassadors of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20), engaged with the world.



Finally, another assumption is that 'context' is the actual and real local situation, not an idealised cultural or religious picture or vision. For example, in a particular Pacific context, someone might say, 'our context or culture is marked by a very high respect between brothers and sisters, expressed by physical separation, various forms of respectful address, various *tabu* etc.'. It might be very tempting to say that this description is the 'context' (or culture) and leave it at that. (Perhaps one might call this the idealised culture or context.) However, if one digs further and finds that *in reality* (even though the above picture has some measure of truth), in a particular case, a brother has just beaten his sister unconscious because he has observed her talking with her secret boy friend, that act of violence is also a part of the context and must be taken into account, not suppressed. Contextual theology deals with *what is real*, what actually happens, rather than idealised explanations that suppress part of reality. It is realistic rather than idealistic. Of course, part of a context or 'culture' may be the suppression of information about certain things (sex, for example); that suppression, then, becomes part of the context; it is not simply ignored.

## 2. The 'Hermeneutical Circle' and unpacking 'Christian Contextual Theology'

In these assumptions, I have already begun to define 'Christian contextual theology'. To go further, I would add one other defining assumption: that the *starting point* of theological reflection (and ultimately Christian action and ministry) should be the *local context itself*, rather than, say, Scripture or manifestations of Tradition such as historical Creeds and Catechisms. This is the point at which some traditional Christians begin to draw away from 'contextual theology', claiming that it is rooted in human experience rather than Christian revelation. However, this is a misunderstanding.

The best way to explain this misunderstanding and to put forth clearly the strength of Christian contextual theology (while not denying its potential weaknesses) is to explain what is commonly called the

'hermeneutical circle'. But first, one must give a tentative definition of 'hermeneutics'.

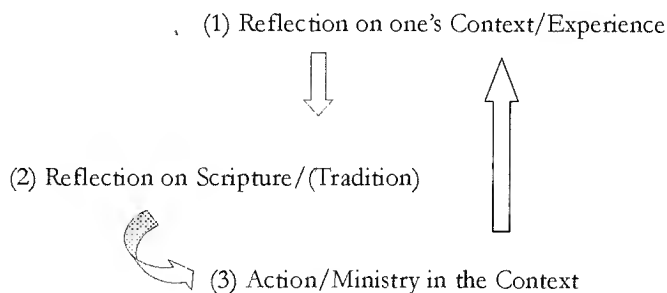
'Hermeneutics', while a rather frightening sounding word, is one that theologians of any kind must deal with. It is encouraging that there is today broad ecumenical consensus from Protestant Evangelicals to Roman Catholics to Eastern Orthodox of the significance of hermeneutics; the only exception would be extreme protestant fundamen-talists who treat every word of the Bible as somehow directly uttered by God and entirely self-evident in meaning (oblivious even to problems of translation); but even they must eventually resort to some use of hermeneutics to deal with more extreme passages of the Old Testament, thereby calling into question their rejection of hermeneutics for other 'more obvious' Scriptural texts.

I shall quote part of a definition of 'Hermeneutics' from a conservative evangelical source, *New Dictionary of Theology*, although I think the definition would be subject to broad ecumenical consensus. The entry defines hermeneutics as 'the theory of interpretation'. It continues,

Traditionally and until very recently [hermeneutics] has been taken to mean the study of rules or principles for the interpretation of particular texts. But this definition is too narrow. First, hermeneutics concerns not only the interpretation of texts but *the interpretation and understanding of any act of communication*, whether written or oral, verbal or non-verbal (such as symbols or symbolic acts) . . . The subject is no longer seen as a supplementary tool for ensuring 'correct' interpretation, but as a profound reflection on the very basis and purpose of interpretation, and of how we decide what would count in the first place as a 'correct' interpretation . . . (ACT 1988:293; emphasis added)

In other words, hermeneutics (remember the Greek god Hermes = *messenger* of the other gods) is the process whereby we try to determine what is the meaning or message of Scripture (and more broadly of the Creeds, Catechisms, Liturgies and other meaningful texts and actions of the Christian life) so that they may effectively and correctly shape our Christian lives, whatever our context.

One common (and fairly ecumenical way) to approach hermeneutics – and one upon which contextual theology relies heavily – is commonly known as the ‘hermeneutical circle’ (or, perhaps more accurately, the ‘hermeneutical spiral’). In its simplest form (I have used lines, but they should be seen as a circle), one can draw it as follows:



Contextual theology argues that serious, deep and realistic reflection on one's context and experience ([1] above) is the starting point for theological reflection; this reflection then leads one to deep reflection on Scripture ([2] above) (here biblical hermeneutics comes to the fore) and (many would say) Tradition, or at least the history of Biblical interpretation and action; the interaction of (1) and (2) then leads to meaningful and effective Christian action and ministry ([3] above) within one's context, shaping it in a Christian direction. The process then continues to repeat itself in an ongoing self-critical circular or spiralling direction. (This process can be related to traditional Christian spiritualities that speak of a spiralling perfection of human nature by grace.) The spiralling, however, is not *away* from the world (context) or Scripture, but *towards* a greater and greater engagement with both the

world (context) and Scripture in the context of prayer and worship; thus, that spiralling also draws one closer and closer to God.

This contextually-engaged 'hermeneutical circle' is to be contrasted to a 'de-contextualised' theology, which leaves out context as part of the theological contribution and sees the Christian life only as a kind of 'application' of Scripture, Tradition and/or Christian theology to the world through Christian ministry (that is, Scripture or a Creed or a Catechism or a theological formulation tells us to do something, we do it, the story is finished). The result of such a 'top-down theology' is often ineffective ministry and what is sometimes called 'cognitive dissonance', whereby what one actually experiences (cognition) is very different (dissonant) from what 'the message' (Scripture or Tradition) says that one should experience. Non-contextual theology ignores real human needs in the name of a false understanding of Christian revelation. Theologically, perhaps we can say it is the application of an external non-contextual (or, perhaps better, 'wrong-contextual') 'law' (to use a Pauline concept) rather than being drawn into the highly contextual parables of Jesus. In contrast, contextual theology recognises that *Christianity is a way of life in a particular context*, not simply the application of abstract Christian beliefs or principles to particular situations.<sup>1</sup>

To 'unpack' the hermeneutical circle further, let me say a bit about each of the points on it, which I refer to as poles. As I have already indicated, 'Reflection on one's Context/Experience' demands a realistic, holistic assessment of one's entire context, whether local, national or global, both political and personal. This assessment should produce an awareness of strengths, indeed, treasures that should not be lost. It will also produce an awareness of oppression, suffering, alienation and sin. *The stories of the subjects themselves are most important.* Here tools of the social sciences (anthropology, sociology, economics and psychology) and history also need to come in. (Latin American Liberation Theology was famous for its use of Marxist economic analysis in this area – the identification of oppression with economic exploitation of the poor by the rich). Some of this analysis is highly





local and not very accessible initially to those outside, perhaps by reason of language, culture and idiosyncratic social change; some of this analysis is shared on a national (for example, 'ethnic tension' in the Solomons) or international (critique of 'globalisation') level; part of our work at this conference, indeed, might be to identify that common context for the Pacific today or to share cognate (parallel) local and national contexts. But the analysis of these contexts must also be profound and accurate, not just what the popular media and/or politicians say it is. Solomon Islands 'ethnic tension', for example, may prove to be more economic than ethnic and the Pacific response to globalisation may be more modification of it than defeat by it. Similarly, as noted above, the gap between local cultural ideals and the actual reality must be noted and taken seriously. Finally, all of these analyses must be related to and integrated with one another.

One then moves on to Scripture and Tradition.<sup>2</sup> Here hermeneutics presses upon us, whether we are dealing with the Bible or the historic Creeds of the Church. Here, through holistic biblical criticism, one must examine and understand the contexts (note the plural, contexts) – the cultural, political, economic and religious settings of the Bible, particularly the context of the relevant texts, in an attempt to help determine meaning in one's own context and culture. Inevitably, especially in the New Testament, there will be tension between the overall meaning of Christ's Revelation and Witness ('This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you', John 15:12) and the messages or meaning of particular stories (for example, passages that seem to condone slavery or the oppression of women). This problem becomes more acute when the stories contradict one another (for example, St. Paul in one setting praising women prophets' revelations in the church, while in another, forbidding them to speak in church). Here the Biblical languages are also significant to get at the depth of meaning of what is being conveyed. The Bible is not a seamless document, dictated by God as one totally coordinated and integrated revelation or message to humankind. It is a collection of very human texts, written (and re-written!) in a variety of cultural contexts, in two very different languages (and consequent thought forms) by very

different people over many hundreds of years – which we as Christians still believe to be the divinely inspired word of God. Scripture itself, therefore, is deeply contextual; and biblical hermeneutics is the necessary attempt to get inside these contexts, to help clarify the divine meaning or message for us today in our particular contexts. Nor is the Bible's own context static in each time and place with contexts unrelated to one another: one sees the *development* of Christian doctrine, for example, in the movement of Christian faith from the Jewish to the Greek world as early as St Paul's Epistles and the Gospels.

In addition to the barrier of the Scripture's context(s) often being so different from our own (but then, sometimes, surprisingly similar, especially in the Pacific), there are other barriers that need to be dealt with. As few of us know the Biblical languages well, we read the Bible in a translation that is often not our own language (for example, English or French); and even a translation into our own language has already made many herme-neutical decisions for us. For example, how adequate are the English *holy* and the Oceanic *tabu* (and cognates such as *aabu* or *tapu*) as translations of the Hebrew  $\text{קָדוֹשׁ}$  (*kâdôsh*)? The problem is perhaps not so difficult for narration (for example, Jesus's parables, but even here some of the parables do not make sense unless one understands their contexts) but it is much more difficult for the more overtly theological passages of St. John's Gospel or St. Paul's Epistles. Early missionaries and contemporary theological educators (myself included) often come to us from other cultures, European or perhaps Asian, with their own 'filters', languages, histories and cultural and contextual experience. Still another element is the history of interpretation of the particular passage (viewed critically) and the doctrinal and creedal formulations that have arisen out of it, for example, in interpreting the Preface to John's Gospel, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

To 'produce meaning', one brings together one's own context (as explained above) and Scripture<sup>3</sup> in all of its multiple and complex contextual character (as explained above) and, prayerfully in community, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, tries to discern what is to be



done, that is, what action is the correct one – and do it. ‘So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead’ (James 2:17). Such action impacts upon and changes the original context. One has followed the circle back to context and experience, reflecting on the effectiveness of one’s action, and the circular or spiral process continues onward.

If one understands one’s Christian faith as fully participating (both as community and individual) in the above ‘hermeneutical circle’, one can enter at any point in the circle and move onwards around the circle; in this sense, one’s context does not need to be the actual starting point, as long as one comes around to it and takes it seriously. For example, one might wish to stop in the middle of some sort of ministry or action one is involved in and move on to reflection on the context of the ministry or action, then onto Scripture, then back to the action, probably with a new perspective and new action. However, to start with Scripture (even understanding its context) and moving to action without an analysis of one’s own context is dangerous; one must consider one’s own context *and* Scripture before one acts. Therefore, reflection on one’s context remains the primary starting point of theological reflection.

### 3. What are the alternatives?

I have described Christian contextual theology as moving around the hermeneutical circle (or, more properly, spiral), starting with one’s own context (local, national and global). This movement is rooted deeply and only makes sense when it is rooted in faith in Jesus Christ and the Church, the Body of Christ. This movement should not just be that of the individual (well-educated) theologian or priest or pastor or bishop, but of the whole Christian community, whatever its formal educational level. (The community may be short on formal education but very rich in experience, the primary building block contextual theology.) In Latin American Liberation Theology, Ernesto Cardenal’s multi-volume *Gospel in Solentiname*<sup>4</sup> (1978) is a classical example of a small poor rural community reflecting on its context and options for action in the light

of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is contextually-based Bible study as it ought to be, over against the Bible study leader lecturing to the group, which is the more common practice (and, unfortunately, what clergy and laity sometimes prefer). Likewise, effective preaching starts from the context of the preacher and the hearers (preferably in conversation with one another the week before) and moves to Scripture and action, rather than starting with an exegesis of the text, which is then 'applied' to a situation or context.

So much Christian theology or Christian life begins at one of the three poles and simply stops there or moves only to the next pole, without going around the circle. Most commonly, theology (or theological reflection) begins with point (2), Scripture (or Tradition or a theological tradition expressed in a confessional Catechism or the work of a noteworthy theologian such as Luther or Calvin) and simply stops there, an end in itself, without impacting seriously upon the context, or doing so only in a very limited way; or it moves on to unreflective decision-making and action, perhaps through use of 'proof texts' (the use of particular passages of Scripture in isolation from the rest of the Bible to decide particular moral or other theological questions). (For example, the Ten Commandments say to keep the Sabbath; therefore, a group decides to abandon Sunday for the Sabbath, Saturday, anathematising Christians who continue to keep Sunday as the Day of Resurrection, the Lord's Day.) So many bad sermons take this shape. The preacher struggles across cultural and language barriers to try to make an exegesis of a passage of Scripture, often not in the first language of the hearers or even the preacher; then the preacher stops there, 'applying' the message to the contemporary context in only a very limited and confused way, if at all. (Instead, good preaching should start with the context – for example, a story of a critical issue within the context, not just a trivial story used to illustrate the text.) Similar to this pattern is the use of certain passages of Scripture or a Catechism or a 'church law' or canon to answer or solve a problem, with little contextual awareness of either the source of authority or the context to which it is being applied. Sometimes there is even the assumption that somehow there will be a divine intervention or miracle



in support of the (non-contextual) revelation, which will prevent one from needing to get one's hands dirty in ministry in a very difficult context. At its worst, non-contextual 'propositional' (certain statements definitively constitute 'orthodoxy', full stop, there's no more to be said) understandings of Scripture, Revelation and the Gospel, applied without discrimination to a multitude of situations without regard to their various contexts, is ultimately oppressive and alienating, attractive as it is to insecure and confused communities and individuals. It is the sin of fundamentalism, whether Catholic or Protestant.

But there are also problems with getting stuck at the other two poles. For example, one can research and research a context and document its ongoing development in great detail and accuracy, but this research will have no great significance (from a Christian perspective) unless one submits the researched context to the Gospel of Jesus Christ for critique, transformation and action, in a process in which one participates fully. 'And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries *and all knowledge*, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing' (1 Corinthians 13:2).

Likewise, Christian activism without deep reflection on both Scripture/Tradition and the current (often changing) context makes for the wrong solutions to problems and 'burnout'. Sometimes one becomes so accustomed to the various solutions (forms of ministry, varieties of Christian action) one has developed or championed that one continues on with them even when the context shifts (requiring new analysis) and different Scriptural passages come to the fore. Indeed, one may become irrelevant and one's flock perhaps go elsewhere.

A further problem is that of moving around the hermeneutical circle so slowly (perhaps by reason of caution or simple laziness) that, by the time one returns to the context, it has changed so much that one's action is no longer relevant or effective; it is a new context. For this reason, I tell clergy new to a context not to observe too long but to get into reflective action ('into the hermeneutical circle') as soon as possible, even if some mistakes are made. Ours is a world of very

rapidly changing contexts.

#### 4. An example of contextual theology: the story of Malaita's Sabbath-keeping Anglicans

Contextual theology is highly local while at the same time quite aware of larger national and global contexts. Therefore, rather than deal in abstractions or generalisations further, I will attempt to do some contextual theology by simply telling a story from the context of the Diocese of Malaita. My apologies if any do not want to hear a story from Malaita or have heard it already – contextual theology is also listening to each other's stories and, indeed, retelling them with new understanding – and I tell the story not because Malaita is the best but because it has just as many problems as any place else, some of them (such as the Province's endless land disputes) seemingly almost intractable. The story may sound 'alien' or 'exotic' to people from other places, but it is not, really. It is simply part of our context.

For those of you not familiar with Solomon Islands geography, Malaita is a relatively large and heavily populated island about one-half hour by air or six hours by boat north of Honiara, the national capital on Guadalcanal. Despite several distinct languages, Malaita is relatively culturally homogeneous; indeed the languages blend from dialect to dialect, turning into mutually unintelligible languages as links in the chain grow distant from one another; similarly, cultural practices and history of all parts of the island are cognate and interrelated. In colonial and missionary times, Malaita had a reputation for ferocity and resistance to colonial and missionary activity; however, there was strong Malaitan participation in the indentured labour trade to Queensland and Fiji. Kanaka returnees reshaped the cultural, political, economic, linguistic and religious life of the island and set in motion forces that are still active today.

While Malaitans did not much participate in Fr Richard Fallowes's pre-World War II 'Chair and Rule' proto-Parliamentary movement



(based in Ysabel, Gela and Savo) against the British colonial administration, they worked closely with the American military occupation of Guadalcanal and went on to initiate the post-war *Maasina Rul* ('Marching Rule') Movement, which saw Malaita reject the authority of the British Protectorate government and establish its own highly disciplined and independent Malaita state. Eventually, the British quelled *Maasina Rul* through arrests and imprisonment but were forced to begin moving towards self-government and independence for the Solomons.<sup>5</sup> However, because of its large population, inhospitable landscape and tradition of outward migration for economic purposes, Malaitans continued to move out of Malaita for the last half of the twentieth century, especially settling on north Guadalcanal until checked by the Guadalcanal uprising in 1999, though such movement still continues to Honiara and other parts of the country. To some extent, the Malaita Eagle Force, the Malaitan military response to the expulsion of Malaitans from Guadalcanal by the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army/Guadalcanal Liberation Front, saw themselves in the tradition of *Maasina Rul*, asserting Malaita nationalism in the face of external oppression (just as the GRA/GLF were in some respect an extension of the post-War neo-custom Moro Movement on the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal). Some ex-MEF prisoners in Rove Prison, of course, continue to have this same nationalist feeling against the Australian-led Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) although it is not shared by the bulk of Malaitans, many of whom felt more exploited than liberated by the MEF. All of this is background (context) to the story I am about to tell.

Early morning on Wednesday, 1 June this year [2004], as we were driving out to the Diocese's lay training centre, the siren of a police vehicle stopped us. The police informed me that during the night a group had come into the Diocese's Cathedral (an historic building at Fiu village, about 15 minutes from Auki) and 'burnt the Cathedral's altar'. Confused, I thought something had happened in Honiara, but finally realised they were talking about Fiu. I accompanied the police to the Cathedral. True enough, during the night, a group had come into the Cathedral, pushed the sanctuary chairs, prayer desks and candle

sticks up around the altar, placed the communion vessels, prayer books, cassocks and other fabric on top the altar, poured on kerosene and set it all alight. Parishioners, seeing fire come out from the roof of the Cathedral, first thought a miracle had taken place but quickly realised it was a fire. Using nearby wells, they put the fire out in short time, so there was little damage to the building as a whole: one side of the altar was badly charred and prayer desks, cassocks, books and other fabric were either damaged or destroyed; however, the altar cross and candle sticks and the Cathedral's sacred vessels were untouched by the fire and damage was not as great as we first feared. But perhaps most disturbingly, the arsonists had put the Reserved Sacrament on the altar, and it was destroyed in the fire. The congregation I found singing hymns and choruses before the ugly mess; the singing turned into a great wail (as though someone had died) when I arrived. Over the next few days, the parishioners worked hard at cleaning up the mess and the next Sunday I presided at the Eucharist (at the charred altar, rotated 180 degrees so its untouched side was forward) and spoke with the congregation about what had happened. Assisted by insurance money and gifts from overseas, we are now restoring the altar and furnishings. Life at the Cathedral has normalised but all remain shocked at what happened.

As I talked with the Premier of Malaita before the smouldering altar that morning (his house is nearby), it became clear to us what group was responsible for the fire. For one thing, there was a note, signed by someone with his own name, James Elliott, calling on Fiu people to return to Malaita Law and denouncing RAMSI.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, a band of young men from Fiu had already taken off to the group's village to take revenge. Quickly we drove around and then walked to the group's village, not entirely sure how we would be met. The group are about 20 persons, mostly men and boys, all part of one extended family, calling themselves 'Sabbath-keeping Anglicans'. (I had been having friendly conversations with the group over the previous year and had visited the village once before.) We were well received and a parishioner from a nearby village told us that the principal perpetrator of the fire had confessed and was sitting quietly in the rest house. I





joined him and discussed his motivations, surrounded by Anglicans from Fiu and another nearby village, who also joined in the conversation. James is one of the more extreme followers of Benjamin Mana'abu, the leader of the group, an occasional visitor to my house; Benjamin, however, claimed to have no knowledge of the fire. Unapologetically, James readily admitted to setting the fire.

James's explanation was long, involved and rambling (possibly he was high on marijuana). He said that, like Jesus purifying the Temple, he was punishing the Fiu Anglicans for their disobedience and hypocrisy, but more particularly their failure to observe the Sabbath (Saturday), as decreed by both the Bible and 'Malaita Law'. He explained that because the first Malaitans were a lost Tribe of Israel, who came by canoe from Jerusalem, Malaita custom and the Jewish law were basically identical, so that the Ten Commandments of the Bible are identical with 'Malaita Law', the true religion of Malaita. On the other hand, the government (whether national or provincial), the Church and RAMSI all represented foreign 'English Law' and were to be rejected. The Cathedral altar fire was an attack on 'English Law', the government (including the Premier), the non-observance of the Sabbath, and RAMSI (for its breaches of Malaita custom). Any attempt at theological discussion trying to bring in the New Testament was fruitless: it eventually became clear that any theological discussion of changes that took place in New Testament Christianity as it moved to from the Jewish to the Gentile world was irrelevant to these people. According to the group, 'English law' and Sunday observance are for Gentiles; Malaitans are Jews who came to Malaita before the (Gentile) English government and missionaries and do not need it; they already have (Jewish) 'Malaita Law' and the Sabbath.<sup>7</sup>

Most of the Sabbath-keeping Anglicans (SKAs) are illiterate, so their highly contextual theology comes from a combination of traditional culture and religion with Christianity (a classical syncretistic 'adjustment movement' or 'cargo cult' – a couple years ago they called extended family members from as far away as Gela to await goods being flown into the village in a helicopter); the views of similar groups (such as the Remnant Church<sup>8</sup> in the Kwara'ae bush and the neo-Israel movements

within the South Seas Evangelical Church); Bob Marley and Rastafarianism (there is heavy marijuana use to produce visions and attract converts); what they have picked up of the Bible (mostly the Old Testament, especially the Ten Commandments)<sup>9</sup>; personal disappointment at their own poverty and marginalisation; nationalist anger at what they see as a foreign occupation of Malaita (RAMSI) and even militant Islam (they had declared 1 June as the start of a 'Holy War' [their term] of the Sabbath vs. Sunday). James complained that the Diocese ought to be handing out free wine, wafers and candles to villages rather than oppressing people by requiring them to buy these things and asking them to contribute to the financial support of the Diocese; similarly, he complained about the frequent collections of the Mothers' Union. Although up to the Cathedral burning I had had good relations with the group, I am sure that the fact that I am a European (especially now that I have not rescued them from jail, as requested) feeds into this vision of the superiority of Malaita Law and the Sabbath (which they think should be imposed over all of Malaita) over oppressive 'English Law'.<sup>10</sup> I waited with James and the others until the Police finally arrived and arrested both James and Benjamin. They are in prison, awaiting trial for arson. The Fiu parish priest and nearby catechists continue to try, with limited success, to work with the community.

At this point, one might be tempted to stop and say that this is all so weird and exotic and different from the lives of ordinary Christians (and especially Anglicans) in Malaita that it is not worth pursuing further. It is easy to write off such a group as 'extremist' and forget them. However, contextual theology must not fear to go further into a difficult context and the hermeneutical problems that it entails. Therefore, I shall continue the story for a little longer.

Somewhere after about 1910, a Kwara'ae man, Charles Turu, returned to his home village of Fiu in Malaita after a period of indentured labour on a sugar cane plantation in Fiji. In Fiji he had become an Anglican. However, he returned with not just a Bible and Prayer Book but also a *yagona* [Fijian spelling, pronounced yanqona]



(kava) bowl. Upon his return, the Bishop chose him to be prepared for ordination as a priest. However, at the same time, Turu practised a form of Christian divination whereby he and his male relatives drank kava with prayer, resulting in the discernment of various visions and revelations relevant to the community. During this time, the Anglican missionaries were very concerned about a 'kava cult' spreading in North and Central Malaita, apparently precipitated by labourers returning from Fiji, so Turu's 'kava activities' were apparently hidden and overlooked.<sup>11</sup> Eventually, despite doubts about his character, the Bishop ordained Turu as the first Kwara'ae Anglican priest. The 'kava activities' continued and somewhere along the line Turu's descendants built a small leaf *kastom* house in Kelakwai village near Fiu to house the *yaqona* bowl, Turu's books and other holy objects associated with him, including his walking stick and a special round holy stone. Various bishops and priests tried, without much success, to suppress the movement.<sup>12</sup> By the mid-1990s, the *kastom* house was a permanent building with an iron roof and louvres, a considerably more substantial structure than the nearby semi-permanent church building.

A year or two after arriving in Malaita in 1996 as Bishop, I heard of the *kastom* house and its history. I interviewed Fr Charles's descendants, who still used it (including one of my priests and his catechist brother) and they assured me that they did not regard it as un-Christian in any way – that it was a family memorial to Fr Charles, the first Kwara'ae priest, that all prayers offered were to the Christian God, not ancestral or other spirits, and that the ceremony was not unlike the Eucharist in certain respects. They claimed that Fr Charles had learned the practice from an English missionary in Fiji. Indeed, they explained that kava had been in short supply in recent years and that they were using the house for prayer, meditation and discernment without kava. Somewhat tolerant in these matters and seeing it as a possibly legitimate expression of indigenous Christianity, I decided to let the matter go for a while, though with some reservations, warning the participants of the risks of false discernment and accusations in determining the causes of illness.<sup>13</sup> I also asked the various parish priests to continue to monitor the use of the *kastom* house. I later learned (from a parish priest who

took part in the ceremony) that after a good harvest of kava, the full ritual with kava had been reinstituted. However, many in the nearby large village of Fiu regarded the continued use of the *kastom* house as a heathen practice that should be suppressed.

One of the Kelakwai villagers who participated in the ceremonies of the *kastom* house was Benjamin Mana-abu, previously mentioned. He was named after his uncle (one of the priest descendants of Fr Charles Turu) and, initially encouraged by his uncle, he developed a devotion to Fr Charles and the *kastom* house, combined with (*not* encouraged by his uncle) the use of marijuana instead of kava for visions. A dispute arose within the Kelakwai community, partly over authority over the *kastom* house and partly around land, so last year [2003] Benjamin led his extended family to a new site farther inland from Kelakwai. The move was accompanied by violent conflict concerning Benjamin's taking Fr Charles's walking stick and holy stone while leaving the *yaqona* bowl behind (by this time, the books had long since disintegrated). This theft enraged the Kelakwai community, who eventually had another of Fr Charles's priest descendants bless a new walking stick and holy stone for the Kelakwai *kastom* house, over the objections of the Fiu parish priest, who was trying to put the brakes on re-developing the *kastom* house, in favour of more conventional Anglican worship in the nearby church.

At the new site, Benjamin built a new, small, leaf *kastom* house to Fr Charles's memory, which I visited when I first visited the community in mid-2003. It had three rooms – an outer verandah for meeting people, an inner bedroom and finally the 'holy of holies', a small shrine containing Fr Charles's walking stick and the holy stone, set atop a blanket of golden limestone pebbles. The shrine to Fr Turu had a certain aura and Benjamin was quite proud of it. Though married with a family, Benjamin slept by himself in the shrine, not unlike a *kastom* priest. In his teaching, Benjamin claimed that the 'the seven sacraments had been revealed' to him, although, illiterate as he was, all he could claim for it was an exercise book full of numbers and scribbles. (The Sabbath teaching had not yet emerged at that point.) I felt rather sorry



for him but also felt a certain admiration at his effort to be a religious Malaitan; I promised that the church would try to give him more teaching and respect his leadership role, though warning him of the risks of marijuana. He assured me that he was an Anglican and respected me as Bishop. On that visit, as we left the village, we met the local expatriate Jehovah's Witness missionary walking into the village. After that, I met Benjamin from time to time in town. He and the parish priest did not hit it off very well and I heard stories of continuing marijuana use and tension with Kelakwai village.

The group re-emerged for me on a Monday morning in early March this year [2004]\_when a parishioner from Kwalubusu village (near Benjamin's village farther inland) came to the office in tears reporting that they had been attacked by Benjamin and his followers as they had come out from church on Sunday morning. Benjamin and company had denounced their Sunday worship, broken the walling of their community house, spoiled some cooked food prepared for a bazaar, got drunk on *kwaso* (home brew) and stolen their altar cross (which eventually re-appeared early on Monday morning). I reported the matter to the police, who arrested Benjamin and some of his followers later in the week, held them in the police cell for 24 hours and then released them, pending charges.

The next Sunday I went out to Kwalubusu to preside at the Eucharist and talk with the villagers about what had happened. Benjamin and company sent word that they would like to come to the community meeting after the Eucharist, to explain themselves. The villagers and I agreed. Gaunt, bearded, holding walking sticks and looking very Rastalike in their dreadlocks and knitted hats, they arrived carrying their blackboard of explanations. It was then that we heard of their turn to Malaita Law and Sabbath-keeping; the Ten Commandments had clearly replaced the Seven Sacraments and Fr Turu had completely dropped out of the picture. There was a good discussion in which Benjamin and his followers, the Kwalubusu catechist and villagers, the Parish Priest, the Diocesan Programme Officer, a visiting priest from England and I all took part. Much of the discussion was on Jesus's understanding of

the Sabbath. It ended with an agreement to disagree. I invited Benjamin and company to come to the Bishop's House later in the week for a fuller discussion. This took place amicably but went nowhere as I could not acquiesce to their demand (which apparently came after a month of fasting in the bush) that I change the Diocese's day of worship from Sunday to Saturday; nor would they agree to my coming to celebrate the Eucharist for them on a Sunday; they said it must be a Saturday, as my recognition of the priority of the Sabbath over Sunday. Yet they declared they were still Anglicans, 'Sabbath-keeping Anglicans'. The next event was the burning of the Cathedral altar (including the Reserved Sacrament) in the name of Malaita Law and the Sabbath.

I last saw Benjamin on a visit to Rove Prison recently; he, James and another follower are being held on remand before their trial for arson and possibly other charges. The community continues without their leadership. They offered to do a *kastom* dance in honour of the visit of the Archbishop of Canterbury to the Diocese of Malaita on 21 July. Time was limited so we declined. Because the Archbishop of Canterbury might be regarded as the very epitome of 'English Law' from the point of view of the Sabbath-keeping Anglicans, security was very tight during the Archbishop's visit but nothing happened. We continue to work with the community and are trying to work at reconciliation between them and Kelakwai. They are all one extended family.

This discussion of context has largely dealt with the highly local context, although the story has extended back historically to Fiji and onwards to Honiara. And, of course, the group's interaction with RAMSI is with a multinational, international military and police force. Indeed, the story reflects the Sabbath-keeping Anglicans' negative reaction to any international involvement in Malaita, whether government (especially RAMSI) or church (myself and the Diocese) as oppressive – alienating and destructive of Malaitan culture and (their term) 'Malaita Law'. This isolationist response may reflect disappointment that RAMSI (and the church) have only brought the *picture* of the wealth of the outside world to them but they have not



really benefited in any way materially by RAMSI (or even the church). Other (largely SSEC) New Israel movement groups have attempted to reach out to the State of Israel in various ways, but this group is too isolated to do so, though such a direction could come. The Sabbath-keeping Anglicans apparently do not have much interest even in participating in the global economy or socio-economic development.<sup>14</sup> They have quit working in their gardens and withdrawn from modern economic life in favour of a messianic vision of a future Kingdom of Malaita where there will be gold, precious stones, oil and lots of money. It will be accomplished through the faithful adherence of the whole of Malaita to Malaita Law. However, if the option of some form of better economic development were offered, the story might change.

This is a very long story and in many ways not untypical of Christianity in Malaita today. All of the churches struggle with such things as visions, prophecies, syncretistic mixtures of Christianity and *kastom*, neo-*kastom* re-workings, violent conflicts, land and genealogical disputes, illiterate interpretations of written Scripture, literalist interpretations of Scripture, Old Testament interpretations of the New Testament, and economic under-development, not to mention new outside religious groups (Global Ministries International, Mormons, Moonies, Christadelphians, Rhema, Living Word, New Apostolic) in conflict with the more traditional Anglican, Roman Catholic, South Seas Evangelical and United Churches.<sup>15</sup> The story also illustrates how absolutely complex a local context can be, once one looks at all its aspects.

## 5. A brief theological reflection on the story

Having spent so much time on the story, which is an attempt to describe a particular context, how do we go forward on the hermeneutical circle? First, I hope it is clear that within the narration of the story there has already been a moving around the hermeneutical circle from context to interpretation of Scripture to action back to context, and so on. Indeed, there are *two* main hermeneutical circles or

spirals in the story – that of the Sabbath-keeping Anglicans and that of the Diocese, Parish Priest and myself – which from time-to-time intersect and overlap. I shall say a bit about each.

The Sabbath-keeping Anglicans represent a highly contextual Malaitan Christian theology and way of life. (There is no doubt about 'Malaitan' although some might doubt 'Christian'. However, despite their relative lack of interest in the New Testament, the group does not deny Christ; they are interested in him only as his occasional strong sayings in support of the Jewish Law support their view of the Ten Commandments and Malaita Law.) Deeply entrenched in local Kwara'ae language, culture, religious traditions, history and consciousness (including Anglicanism as brought to the community by one of their own, Fr Charles Turu), that is, a strong local context, relatively untouched by European consciousness or concerns, they have moved along the hermeneutical circle to reflection on Scripture. However, because they are largely illiterate, this reflection cannot be on the text of the Bible itself. Rather, reflection is on what they have heard of Biblical teachings in sermons (from a variety of denominational sources including Anglican, SSEC, Seventh Day Adventist, Jehovah's Witness and Remnant Church), teachings (from Anglican priests, catechists, the Bishop and the SSEC itinerant preacher who stays with them, Remnant Church leaders, etc.), supplemented by dreams and visions prompted by long periods of fasting in the bush and marijuana use. Because of the affinity of the Old Testament with Malaitan culture, it rather than the New Testament (with its difficult Johannine and Pauline theological abstractions) is the primary Scriptural source, although Jesus's defence of the Law in the Gospels is also noted and used. On the basis of this reflection (largely second hand) on Scripture, supplemented by dreams and visions (not necessarily compatible with Christian belief) action follows. Because the first pole (context) in the hermeneutical circle is so strong and the second pole (Scripture) is so weak, Sabbath-keeping Anglican theology and practice do not move very far beyond the local context, although internal change and development does take place, for example, the shift from the 'Seven Sacraments' to the 'Ten Commandments' as the icon of belief. As a





Christian, I would have to say the SKA contextual theology is inadequate as it omits a major portion of Scripture: due to illiteracy it cannot really engage with the Scriptural text and is at the mercy of the hermeneutical interpretation of others and non-rational extra-biblical sources such as dreams and visions (whether of themselves or others). The group's separation from the Liturgy (Eucharist), which might otherwise give it a Scriptural and ecclesiastical anchor, also weakens the Christian character of its theology and practice. The resulting action is, not surprisingly, problematic: violence, lack of respect of others, narcissism, substance abuse, withdrawal and irrational and unrealistic messianic hope and practice.

My narration of events reflects a second hermeneutical circle or spiral, sometimes intersecting or even overlapping with the one given above. (Of course, there is not necessarily full unanimity in the beliefs of the parish priest, the parish and village catechists, lay parishioners, clergy and laity of the Diocese and myself. So really, there are many individual hermeneutical circles roughly overlapping one another but with divergences depending on the experiences and insights of all concerned.) Because the catechists, clergy and I are literate and theologically trained, we have greater recourse to the Bible (especially the New Testament) and church history (including the development of the Creeds) than do the Sabbath-keeping Anglicans. While I lack deep roots in Malaita culture and languages (though I have certainly acquired some), the clergy, catechists and laity share the same deep roots as the Sabbath-keeping Anglicans, even though they are more conventional or traditional Anglicans. The better educated laity and clergy (including myself) also have recourse to a broader scientific context – the anthropological knowledge, for example, that there is simply no evidence of a direct cultural or physical link between Old Testament Judaism and traditional Malaitan culture (therefore, obliterating the claim that Sabbath [Saturday] observance is a part of Malaita *kastom*), or the history of other similar syncretistic 'adjustment movements' (or 'cargo cults') around the Pacific and in other parts of the world (including other groups claiming to be Lost Tribes of Israel, whether in England, Wales, Armenia, India, Papua New Guinea or wherever). We are also aware of

similar movements in the Diocese over the past thirty years, such as the Jonathan Ilala and George Umai movements. The Diocese and I are also relating to the Sabbath-keeping Anglicans from a context of Eucharistic worship and prayer. However, none of this 'knowledge' means that we do not make mistakes.

In my story, the Diocese and I have already made some hermeneutical assumptions about, for example, the relation between Old Testament Law and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. One assumption (which perhaps needs to be challenged) is that it is more legitimate for Christians to re-interpret the Old Testament in light of the New Testament (for example, as St Paul does in his discussion of Law and Gospel in Galatians) than to re-interpret (or even ignore) the New Testament in light of the Old (as the Sabbath-keeping Anglicans seem to be doing). Some would criticise this view as excessively supersessionist (that salvation through Christ supersedes, indeed obliterates, salvation through the Jewish Law), thus denying the continuing salvific power of God in the Old Testament. (This, of course, is a major theological issue in general; many would hold that Christian supersessionist beliefs are the root of anti-Semitism.) While there is clearly no problem with rediscovering the Jewish roots of the New Testament, the Sabbath-keeping Anglicans do not so much reinterpret the New Testament in terms of the Old as simply ignore major parts of the New Testament altogether, in favour of a rather limited vision of the Old. So one very clear (and I believe correct) hermeneutical assumption in the theological reflection and action of the Diocese and myself is that Jesus Christ, the Church and the New Testament cannot be ignored all together (or major parts dropped), despite the natural ease and affinity between traditional Malaitan culture and the Old Testament.

Other of the Diocese's and my hermeneutical assumptions in the story, which I believe are legitimate, are faith in the Holy Spirit, the Church and human beings as reflecting the Glory of God and the belief that any legitimate religious faith (especially anything claiming to be Christianity) is fundamentally about love and mutual respect.



Therefore, peacefulness and friendship are preferable to hatred and violence; empathy is preferable to condemnation; respect is preferable to contempt; normal and healthy consciousness is preferable to *kwaso* or marijuana-induced euphoria; prosperity is preferable to poverty; community is preferable to eccentric individualism; Revelation through Word and Sacrament is preferable to private visions and dreams; sharing is preferable to greed and theft. If pressed, I could give Scriptural justification for all these assumptions. Some would argue that I should have acted more decisively against the Sabbath-keeping Anglicans, for example, by burning down their *kastom* house, as one of my predecessors and some clergy did to a new Rhema Chapel in an Anglican village in North Malaita in the early 1980s (resulting in their criminal conviction and the poisoning of relations with the Rhema Church in that village to this day). However, I believe that would have been wrong. Of course, I am sure that the Diocese, Parish and I made some mistakes along the way. One hopes that ongoing reflection will identify these.

Despite the contextual, biblical, theological and liturgical strengths of the hermeneutical circle in which the Diocese and I have been involved in our ongoing relations with the Sabbath-keeping Anglicans, it is important to note that these supposed strengths have not attracted the SKAs, because they are seen as foreign ('English Law') rather than Malaitan. Such things as literacy, reading the Bible, scientific understanding, holistic theological reflection, leisure, financial security, sophistication and recourse to the police are, for them, the prerogatives of Europeans or European-like Malaitans. The Sabbath-keeping Anglicans' movement can be interpreted as an attempt to force Malaita Anglicans to be more contextual, or a cry to be incorporated more fully into the benefits of modern Malaitan Christian life, including literacy, education, employment, leadership and prosperity – or both. Therefore, a self-righteous, mocking or even condemnatory response on behalf of the Church is not the right one. Cathedral altars can be repaired.

I believe that in this setting (and others) the aim is as much as possible to bring the two (or more) hermeneutical circles into one, producing unity and love rather than disunity and violence. Perhaps

there are ways that each party needs to compromise to move towards the other. However, there are certain things on which as Christians, they cannot compromise.

Where does one press forward in action on the hermeneutical circle? We (Bishop, Parish Priest, Catechist, Parish) continue to try to reach out to the Sabbath-keeping Anglican community. There does not seem to be agreement whether the community should stay in its present site or move back to Kelakwai. Because the leaders of the Sabbath-keeping community were beginning to make death threats against Sunday-keeping Anglicans, I would prefer to let the court case take its course rather than plead for their release from prison.<sup>16</sup> We continue to reach out on an individual basis to those who were part of the community and have left, welcoming them back into the Diocese. At the same time, we monitor similar groups in other parts of the Diocese, warning them of the difficulties that the Sabbath-keeping group got themselves into. Finally, we try to put forward positive Christian teaching about Christ's love, freedom from the law, the transforming power of the Gospel over various oppressions, including those of idiosyncratic neo-custom movements. If the group finally decides where to settle, we will try to find some ways to help them economically and physically. If the leaders are convicted, I will visit them in prison (as I have already done briefly). A strength of Malaitan Christianity is the constant urge towards reconciliation; so I expect that, ultimately, we shall all be reconciled.

As much as possible, I hope that the Parish itself, which includes Fiu, Kelakwai, Kwalubusu and Gwaesaia, all villages affected in one way or another by the group and where virtually everyone is related by blood or marriage - will work on the reconciliation issue, rather than relying too much on an outside solution (such as the Melanesian Brothers); the conflict has sharpened everyone biblically and theologically (and caused much soul-searching, especially at Fiu) and I am hopeful that the Parish, through the leadership of the parish priest, chiefs, catechists, heads of families supported by the Diocese and myself, will continue to work at reconciliation. The involvement (already begun)



of women (for example, Mothers' Union leaders) in this ministry of reconciliation is especially important, for they have been significant victims of the conflict as marriages and families have been divided. (Indeed, women who refused to follow their husbands into the Sabbath-keeping Anglican group have been victims of violence, their husbands arguing that because of Malaita *kastom*, the wives must follow them into the new group.) There is also a role for outside groups, such as the religious communities and catechist and village priest students at Airahu Training Centre.

## 6. Conclusion

I apologise for the length of this paper and for the long story, but my point is how absolutely essential a deep and realistic understanding of context is to Scriptural reflection, action (ministry) and theological reflection (the hermeneutical circle or spiral). Likewise, my purpose is to note that there is more than one hermeneutical circle and that there must be Christian content and discernment in them all; our goal is to try to bring them into line with one another for the sake of unity and love. I am sure that all of you have similar stories.

Rather than preaching the Gospel in isolation, divorced from context, rather than giving advice divorced from context, (also rather than living deeply in context without the Gospel of Jesus Christ), rather than a 'de-contextualised theology', I would urge us to share our stories, share our contexts, share our ministries and reflect theologically on them in the days of this conference and in the months and years ahead. The aim of all this storytelling and reflection is our future Christian action and ministry as we go out from this place – action and ministry that reflect and, indeed, increase the Love of God in Jesus Christ in our broken and troubled world.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This point is not new; indeed, it goes all the way back to the New Testament. One of the first names for a Christian was a follower of 'the Way' (Acts 9:2).

<sup>2</sup> While I realise that the Protestant tradition often speaks of Scripture as the sole source of Christian revelation (*sola scriptura*), I believe the reality (even for the Protestant tradition) is that Tradition/traditions do and should shape how we live our Christian lives, otherwise we would be paralysed with inaction and forced ever to start from nothing. In any form of Christian life, we are already immersed in Tradition and traditions, in addition to the Scripture. I see them more a unity rather than in conflict with one another or two separate sources of authority. Of course, good contextual theology identifies oppressive and sinful traditions (including of biblical interpretation) and modifies them.

<sup>3</sup> As implied in the previous note, I would also include Tradition and even traditions – for example, the historic Creeds and doctrinal formulations, the history of interpretation, liturgical practices and suchlike.

<sup>4</sup> The *Maasina Rul* Movement has been well documented by historians such as Hugh Laracy and anthropologists such as Roger Keesing, David Atkin and Ben Burt. The long-time Anglican missionary, Charles Fox, discusses it briefly in *Kakamora*. It is very much a part of the oral history of Malaita. Although some local Anglican clergy denounced it, *Maasina Rul* was not strongly directed against the church. It influenced the development of the independent Remnant Church, which broke away from the South Seas Evangelical Mission (later Church), claiming to be the "faithful remnant" of a lost tribe of Israel in the line of Levi. The Remnant Church has survived in the Kwara'ae bush for some fifty years and has had some influence on the 'Sabbath-keeping Anglicans'.

<sup>5</sup> As Elliott is illiterate, another member of the group must have written the letter, although one cannot exclude a forgery by someone who witnessed Elliott set the fire. The note is in the hands of the police and I have not seen the exact text, but a denunciation of RAMSI was a prominent part of it.

<sup>6</sup> There was also much very Puritan-like iconoclasm in James's explanation of his activities – that the altar and cross ('just a piece of



wood') are nothing. Anglicans mistakenly 'worship' them and treat them as idols, while human beings are the true cross, the true altar. 'Anglicans worship the cross but still are full of hatred and hypocrisy', he says and more in similar vein. This criticism of Anglicanism is quite common among evangelical churches of the Solomons; Elliott possibly picked it up from an itinerant SSEC market preacher who has recently joined their group.

<sup>7</sup> Most recently the Remnant Church has been advocating something it calls 'Theocracy' to replace the legally elected Malaita Provincial government. 'Theocracy' is associated with the discovery and opening of the Jerusalem Temple's Covenant Box, thought to be hidden in the Malaita bush. The Premier, a strong supporter of RAMSI, has resisted the influence of this group and continues under some threat from them, having previously, in the *Solomon Star*, denounced them as a cult.

<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that *Maasina Rul* also developed its own Malaitan Ten Commandments and the Ten Commandments play a primary role in the beliefs of the Remnant Church.

<sup>9</sup> As we came back to my truck after the arrests, we noted some writing on the caked mud of the two front door panels. One message read, 'WHAT A MESS!WE ARE MELANESIANS/NO WHITES', the other, 'WHY BISHOP?' I assume the message may have been written by some of the group who participated in the burning of the altar when they left the village. Certainly, the Malaita nationalism comes out in such sentiments. There has been loose talk around of the establishment of some sort of 'Malaita Kingdom' that will drive out RAMSI. RAMSI also has the capacity to cut off the group's supply of marijuana and *kwaso* (home brew). Although I support and cooperate with RAMSI, providing them evidence on various cases (mostly murders, tortures and kidnappings) for investigation, I have also tried to keep a certain distance from them, as I believe their approach in Malaita has sometimes been too heavy-handed. The RAMSI military component has now left Malaita but is still available when needed from its base near Honiara.

<sup>10</sup> The anthropologist David Atkin has documented this movement in a forthcoming article. Pierre Maranda, an anthropologist of the Lau Lagoon has collected one such old *yaqona* bowl brought back from Fiji by Lau indentured labourers. The old Anglican cemetery at Tantalau in the West Kwara'ae bush contains many burials, outside the consecrated ground, of excommunicated followers of the kava cult.

<sup>11</sup> The first Bishop of Malaita, Leonard Alufurai, invoked the 'Gamaliel Principle', 'if this plan or this undertaking is of human origin it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them – in that case you may even be found fighting against God!' (Acts 5:38b-39). Apparently some Bishops did not know about the

existence of the group.

<sup>12</sup> The process used in the Turu *kastom* house (and, indeed, by some clergy and Melanesian Brothers) is not much different from that used in traditional Malaitan religion – discovering through dream or vision who, for example, is using evil magic on someone to cause them to be sick or what deficiencies in relationships are causing the sickness. The only difference is the source of the revelation. The danger, of course, is the possibility that the accusation may be false, causing considerable conflict, even violence, in the community.

<sup>13</sup> Pertinent here is the strong contrast with Fiu village, which over the past 40 years has participated in a great variety of socio-economic development projects. Indeed, the Premier has been deeply involved in these projects, though his involvement has not been without controversy and division in the village. This suggests the possibility that the familiar Solomon Islands phenomenon of economic jealousy may have played some part in the motivation of some of those who burnt the Cathedral altar.

<sup>14</sup> In certain respects, however, the South Seas Evangelical Church has split into many churches, with each Association developing a different theology – traditional evangelical, charismatic, 'New Israel', holiness are examples. These individual Associations function almost as small new denominations in their local settings – hence the SSEC influence on the Sabbath-keeping Anglicans through their SSEC preacher-advisor.

<sup>15</sup> There is the danger that the group would regard such a release without trial as a vindication. Without doubt, James Elliott led the group that set the Cathedral altar fire. He was accompanied by a group of young men, apparently attracted to the movement by the group's teaching and/or by free marijuana. Benjamin claims his innocence but the Fiu Companion Leader, who visited Benjamin with some Melanesian Brothers a couple weeks before the fire, claims they heard him predict that some significant sign would take place at the Cathedral on 1 June. He spoke of that date as the beginning of the Holy War of the Sabbath vs. Sunday. Intending to impose 'Malaita Law' on all Malaita, the group had already attempted to intimidate Gwaisaia village, and it is rumoured that they planned to assassinate prominent Anglicans including the Premier and myself. Before the Kwalubusu case they had, one Saturday, made a knife attack on a Kelakwai woman in her garden, claiming she was profaning the Sabbath. While detained in the police cell in Auki after his arrest, Elliott asked the Police to bring all the people of Malaita together in front of the Auki police station so that he could proclaim 'Malaita Law' to them.





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*A group discussion at the Melanesian Contextual Theology Seminar, held at the Bishop Patteson Theological College, Solomon Islands*



*A theological student in traditional costume*

# Symbolic and Practical Elements of Justice, Peace and Love in Melanesia

## *A Brief Definition of Justice, Peace and Love in Melanesian Context*

### Justice

Justice is present among persons, groups and institutions when their legitimate rights and claims are honoured.

The value of justice is embodied in the cultural norms that form the system that governs the life of the people as a community. Justice is the fair treatment of persons by their neighbours in accordance to the particular rights that have been prescribed by culture for certain groups of people within the community. In Melanesia, women do not have the same rights as men, like you would see in the Western culture where men and women have equal rights<sup>1</sup>

For example women are restricted from expressing themselves freely in the presence of men. They are expected to behave in an orderly manner at all times. In regard to young people for example, the boys are freer to go any way they wish while girls are always under supervision. In the urban centers this is changing.



**Rev. Charles Brown Beu**

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There are two concepts of justice that I wish to bring to your attention as participants in this consultation. The first one is distributive justice. This has to do with rights, claims and prescribed expressions or actions pertaining to fair treatment. In distributive justice, it is seen to be done when people receive what is legally theirs by right. The second one is retributive justice. This has to do with prescribed retributive actions to deal with wrongdoing as a form of deterrence. The person who has violated the norms of justice is brought to justice by punishing him or her. This punishment has two basic objectives. The first one is to deter the offender from violating the rights of others and oppressing their neighbours. Secondly, the offender contributes towards rehabilitating the offended.

By the grace and will of God we are responsible for one another. We provide for other people's needs and they provide for our needs, both as individuals and groups. We give to others and others reciprocate this by giving back to us. The line of duty and responsibility in regards to justice begins with the custodian of the other person's rights and claims. The failure to do one's duty toward the other makes one guilty and the non-reception of what was due could result in crying, or outrage. Justice must therefore be seen as an intrinsically<sup>2</sup> part and parcel of rights and claims. When justice is not done by non-provision of claims or violation of rights, retributive justice takes its course as a way of restoring justice.

## Peace and Love

In the Melanesian context peace and love are so closely connected that when you talk about one you are also referring to the other. Peace and Love refers to a state of friendliness, security, trust and confidence not only in the chief but also in one another. It has to do so with a social environment where the chief is in control of the cultural affairs of his community. This is expressed in mutual respect for one another and in sharing of food and mediums of social interaction like the betel nut, which in itself, is a symbolic show of peace and love.

Contextually, justice, peace and love have to do with relationship. Where there is peaceful and loving relationship there is also just treatment of the other person. The bottom line of justice, peace and love is reciprocation. This means that one does not live one's life for oneself but one lives one's life for the benefit of others as well.

In the Melanesian understanding, justice, peace and love underpin the essence of socio-cultural and religious life of the community. They form the basis of the concepts that are embodied by the cultural norms that help to govern the life of the people. The principle factor here is relationship, sound relationship. That is the communally desired harmonious relationship between individuals and the members of the community as a whole. 'Sound relationship is important because the socio-cultural and religious/spiritual formation of the members of a given community depends very much on the level of relationship between individual members and their leaders and of course the friendliness that exists among the people themselves.

The norms that have been adopted to form the prescribed cultural system of governance provide guidelines for social and moral behaviour. In other words they serve as rules of life that govern human attitudes and actions.

In a community justice is said to be in reign when:

- ◆ Both children and elders learn and practice justice in a reciprocal manner towards one another.
- ◆ Parents and the adult population treat children justly.
- ◆ Leaders (chiefs and elders) deal with their people fairly and make just decisions.
- ◆ The concepts of (abstract as they are) justice, peace and love as expressed in sharing and being responsible for one's actions.
- ◆ The general and specific care that we render to one another.

Justice justifies the charisma of peace and love. It shows that there is a strong bond of relationship in the community. Relationship is important because that is what fosters social stability and spiritual

tolerance, hence peace and harmony. Relationship is the foundation upon which the Melanesian cultural support system depends. Without relationship a Melanesian community falls apart. Relationship boundaries are defined by cultural norms/customs. They set out particular codes of conduct and moral behaviour. It is when these codes of conduct are adhered to that the community will progressively develop and the people harmoniously live together.

## A Melanesian Canoe as a Symbol of Justice, Peace and Love

Justice is like a Melanesian canoe that is sailing towards an anticipated but unknown eternity. It is sailing in an ocean of violence, corruption and injustice let alone hatred. In each Melanesian community the chief captains the canoe. Every member of the community is expected to contribute in making sure that the canoe keeps afloat and moving in the right direction. This is crucial to ensure the security and safety of everyone in the canoe. The canoe is driven along its course by the breeze that is caught in its sail. Symbolically in the Melanesian contextual perspective:

- ◆ The sail stands as a symbol of love. Love and friendship that manifests itself in cordial relationship enables the members of the community to recognize one another as equally deserving social respect, religious tolerance and encouragement.
- ◆ The canoe is steered to course by the chief with a specially designed wooden rudder of home grown timber. The rudder symbolically represents peace. The rudder is necessary to enable the canoe/community to move from point A to point B. The rudder is what makes the desired progressive movement possible.
- ◆ The chief who steers the canoe represents the customs and



the unseen author of those customs that govern the life of the community of which he is the custodian and principal executor. Without the chief and his rudder the canoe will indeed move but in a circle instead of moving forward.

- ◆ The seats inside the canoe stand as cultural platforms of reconciliation. Where relationships have been tarnished people must be made to reconcile with one another so that they can sit together in the canoe and serve one another. Without reconciliation it is not easy to live and work together in a community.
- ◆ To help steady the canoe people or the leaders are expected not to unnecessarily push one another. However, experience has it that people do push one another inside the canoe. And if people take sides and start to sit on the edge of the canoe the water of anarchy or lawlessness can spill into the canoe and submerge it. The Melanesian culture tries to avoid situations as these because the leaders know that it drains human energy and devastatingly strains resources.

Here is what usually happens: when cultural norms are violated, injustice sets in and people become unhappy. Relationships are tarnished and people become divided against one another, even against their leaders. When such a situation occurs in a Melanesian community, the values of justice, peace and love are suppressed and injustice, violence and hatred take over. There is high expectation here for the chief to initiate the necessary peace process towards reconciliation so that justice, peace and love may reign again. In this regard:

- ◆ The chief stands as a living symbol of peace.
- ◆ Culturally the chief is a sacred person, operating in a sacred place, space and time.<sup>3</sup>

- ◆ The chief is set apart for the noble task of teaching, maintaining and restoring peace. He does this by bringing together offender/s and offended/s together and reconciling them to each other as one another and to the community as a whole. He makes offenders become practically responsible for their actions by formally relaying to them the demands of culture upon them to compensate for damages done to others.
- ◆ As a living symbol of peace the chief stands as a teacher of cultural, moral and spiritual principles and values.

## Compensation

When a person offends his/her neighbour justice is denied not only of the offended but also his/her family members as well as the cultural system that governs and unites the people together. Hence the chief's authority and order summons the offender to pay compensation for damages done to the other person. The level or amount of compensation to be paid depends on the nature of the offence. The more serious an offence committed is, the higher the level of compensation will become.

In what ways are compensations paid? There are several forms of payment of compensation. In Solomon Islands the main ones are shell money, red feather money, transfer of land and sacrificial death.<sup>4</sup> The shell money comes in different sizes textures, colours, lengths and sets and they have different values. In Vanuatu the tusks of a pig are used for compensation. It signifies wealth and power, which helps to bring about justice, peace and love in the community. In Fiji it is the *tabua* (the sperm whale's tooth) that is used as a medium of restoring justice, peace, love and reconciliation. In PNG it is the *kina*, pigs and food items.

In Melanesia compensation payments are done in public and never





behind locked doors. This is important because the community do not, or are supposed not to, live for themselves but each lives for the welfare of the other as well as the community as a whole. Justice is therefore seen to be legitimately done when the payment of compensation is witnessed by the community. For instance the shell monies are hung from a crossbeam in front of everyone present. The red feather money coils are suspended on a bamboo pole through the middle of the coils. The transfer of land title is done in the presence of the members of the tribal group so that they will all become aware that a certain piece of land has been transferred to compensate a death. It is important that compensations are done in public firstly because problems that affect any member of the community affect everyone else in the community in one way or another. Secondly, such an occasion becomes a focal point of teaching the cultural norms and values to the people.

### Practical and Symbolic Elements of Justice, Peace and Love.

The practical and symbolic elements of justice, peace and love must be seen, experienced and understood in light of the cultural and traditional structure of the system that governs the community. The agreed patterns of behaviour and the social, moral and spiritual principles that underlie them determine the practical symbols and expressional gestures of the above relational value laden virtues.

For example, the chief in the leadership structure who executes the traditional codes of justice, peace and love is a symbol of justice, peace and love. People see him as someone who is capable of making just decisions as he deals with problems affecting the life of the people. In dealing with people justly peace and love relationships are restored in the community once more.

Obedience and respect for the authority of the chief. For example, willingness to pay compensation demanded on behalf of an aggrieved

person is a sign of justice.

Shell money is a symbol of peace. The shell money has the power to appease or quieten and settle the turbulent mind and aggrieved spirit. The same is true of the Santa Cruz feather money. When given and received in compensation, anger cools off.

Sharing is a practical expression of love. Food is shared with one's neighbour as a gesture of love and friendship. Moreover, people are drawn closer by lending common support to one another in terms of assisting someone who is building a house, cultivating the land for a yam garden, launching a canoe, collecting bride price money for a son or nephew and so on. Custom galas<sup>5</sup> are occasions of celebration, marked by singing and dancing, feasting, sharing of betel nut, making new friends and catching up with old ones. It is a sign of peace and loving embrace in acknowledgement of the other. Marriage is another sign of peace, love and friendship. When two couples get married it is not only them that have come together but their union also brings together their respective tribes. If such tribes had been enemies in the past marriage further solidifies what compensation and reconciliation measures had been taken in the past to reunite the two tribes.

In Santa Cruz, the woman is a symbol of peace. During the tribal warring days women were the only ones who could stop a face to face warfare between tribes. The women would appear from the side between the two groups carrying red feather money on their heads and shouting, "May the rocks and roots of trees break and eat up the arrows of war, for we desire peace for children and ourselves." At the sound of the women's despairing voices, the men would stop shooting at one another; stick their bows and arrows to the ground with the bows facing outwards. Fighting would then stop and necessary compensation and reconciliation would then be facilitated by the leaders of both groups. Although face to face tribal fighting is now done away with, women still symbolize peace in Santa Cruz and other sub-cultures within the Melanesian culture. For instance in a certain culture in the Central Solomon, if two men were fighting, culturally the most recognized



persons to intervene in the fight are the sisters of the two fighting men. They would stop fighting and sort things out more peacefully. This is because of the culturally grounded respect for one's sister. Moreover, Melanesian culture recognizes the peace loving and gentle nature of the female gender. And it is indeed rightly fitting to recognize a woman as a symbol of peace because peace is a virtue that justifies love. No one can truly regard himself or herself as a loving person if his or her attitudes and actions are violent. Justice, peace and love are virtues that are very much alive in the life of the Melanesian culturally cultured women.

## Theological Reflection

As Christians, we must see God as a just and peace-loving God. Justice, peace and love are virtuously characteristic of God in Christ Jesus of history. Justice is one of the four cardinal virtues within the Christian circles. The others being Prudence, Fortitude and Temperance. To these we can add the three so-called theological virtues: ("faith, hope and charity")<sup>6</sup>. While justice is a commendably praiseworthy character, it is also a dimension or measurement of socio-cultural relationship. For instance, a just person will speak words of justice and live a life of justice. He or she will pursue justice in socio-cultural relationships. He will lead and rule justly by speaking words of justice, behaving justly and making just decisions.

The Scripture states over and over again that God is a lover of justice. For instance, God says, "I the Lord God am a lover of justice (Is. 61:8). The Psalmist says, "The Lord loves justice (Ps. 37:28). God's love for justice must be seen as an active love, in that God does not only love justice, he is Justice. God's works of righteousness and his recognition of the needs of the oppressed can only be an attribute of a God who is just in every way (Ps. 140:12). God's justice is also seen in his retributive actions or for the sake of justice. God has always been and will be on the side of the politically, and socially marginalized/ oppressed and victimized by governing systems, both political and

ecclesiastical and cultural. These are areas which must be discussed in detail in the future.

God is a God of peace and love. God loves the people of Melanesia as he does the peoples of the world. God is Love (1 Jn. 4:8, 16b). God's relationship with humanity operates on nothing else than love. The meaning of love is comprised in the relationship that binds the three Persons of the Godhead together. Notably in (Jn. 14:31) John states that the Son loves the Father. "The hallmark of this love is obedience, and the Holy Spirit exhibits the same loving subservience in his relationship to the other two Persons of the Trinity (Jn. 16:13-15)."<sup>7</sup> The Bible paints God's expression of his love for the world, and I would say for Melanesia, in warm supportively caring words that articulate his forgiving and caring nature. He cares for his people like a farmer cares for his vineyard and a shepherd for his sheep (Is. 5:1-7, Jn. 10:11-16). God's love is practical, as practical as the Melanesian cultural perspective of love, which I have explained to you earlier on. For example, God practically brought his people from Egypt through the desert (Dt. 4:37-38). When his people were exiled he showed his love to them by bringing them home (Is. 43:4). It was the Son's love and care for sinners that led to his own act of self-giving (Gal. 2:20)

As Christians in Melanesia therefore my dear friends, how have we imaged God as a lover of justice, as a God of peace and as a God of love, as a provider for the needs of the marginalized, as the voice of the oppressed, as a socio-political, socio-economical, socio-cultural and spiritual icons in our ministry or the ministry of the church?

To emulate God in Christ as best we humanly can, as a lover of justice ... we need our Melanesian culture as the basis for our reflection on these Godly virtues, which bring peace, reconciliation and unity in diversity. We need to return to our Melanesian cultural values that uphold God's justice, peace and love in Christ Jesus the Son. We need to value our culture as the basis for our ministerial and spiritual formation and reformation. The church as an ecumenical body must pray, exist and work for justice, peace and love in a contextual setting



that is familiar to our people. That can only be the Melanesian culture. This means that we must know and understand cultures well.

This calls for the Churches in Melanesia and Oceania to work together for justice and peace. This further calls for a paradigm shift in our approach to ministry. Instead of interpreting the Gospel using concepts of other cultures we need to use our own cultural concepts to become vehicles of the gospel and later we can borrow whatever will be appropriate for our context from other cultures.

Let us now turn to our cultural symbols of justice, peace and love. What are they? They are the shell money, the feather money, the boar's tusks, the *tabua*, the *kina*, the transfer of land and the Santa Cruz sacrificial death of an innocent youth. These are the crosses of Melanesia. They achieve that for the whole world, the love of God achieved on the cross in his Son. These are the extensions of the cross of Christ. Christ died once for all upon the cross to bring about justice, peace and love for the reconciliation of humanity to God. Despite this we realize that injustice, violence and hatred continue to disintegrate human life. God has inspired our people to interpret the meaning of the cross contextually in our cultures by the use of the above cultural artifacts upon which our culture has placed great values. Just like Jesus on the cross, the sons and daughters nature must give up their lives in order to redeem justice, peace and love from the chaotic situations of life today and reconcile the people of Melanesia to one another; the sea shell must die, the Santa Cruz red feathered sparrow must die, the youth must die, the Vanuatu boar must die, the sperm whale must die, the PNG *kina* must die. We must see and experience God in Christ in our culture. The culture must therefore also die and be rebirthed. As leaders we must also die of our individual church denomination centredness and open to ecumenical dialogue and partnership in mission for justice, peace and love.

We must not reject Melanesia culture as though it is not capable of portraying God's love. Present in our culture are all the Christian principles that embody the Godly virtues like justice, peace and love.

We, however, must rediscover them through consultations like this one that has brought us together this week.

The Melanesian canoe is the ecumenical Body of Christ in Melanesia. We need to stand together as an ecumenical Body of Christ to provide a seaworthy vessel that can travel the high seas of injustice, violence and hatred. To effectively do this we need to put our house in order in terms of ecumenical cooperation in addressing issues that threaten justice, peace and unity. This calls for the strengthening of our points of contact in theological education and mission. But not only that we also need to train our people for back up services in the secular fields. We need lawyers. If we cannot train or convert some, or if we in the church are already finding it hard to go through the eye of a needle, the ready-made lawyers will find it even harder. However, for God this is not a stumbling block. If a Palestinian camel can walk through the eye of a needle the Papua New Guinea pig can run freely through and we all can, even if it means crawling through. We need economists. We do have some, but my point is that we need them. We need qualified people in the field of management and administration. We need theo-political leaders<sup>8</sup> and theo-politio-culturecratic<sup>9</sup> systems of governance. The point I am trying to stress here is that the systems that govern God's people in Melanesia and the respective leaders who operate these systems are the major contributors to the causes of injustice, violence and corruption today, I believe. Who are the victims? They are the women, the schoolchildren and the underprivileged that comprise more than 50% of our Melanesian communities. To be effective we have to influence the system; barking from outside makes very little sense. The involvement of the Melanesian Brothers in the peace process in the Solomon in the recent crisis is an example (but I mean more than that) of what I am trying to say. The Brothers did not just pray for justice, peace, love, mercy and reconciliation. They went out and availed themselves to be the vehicles of their own prayers, the prayers of the Church, the prayers of the oppressed and the prayers of friends in many parts of the world.

For what good will it do to a needy neighbour and what glory



will it give to God if you pray: "Father God, please bless by friend John," if you do not avail yourself to be a channel of God's blessing for him? We must avail ourselves to be the channels of the anticipated answers. Only then can the Melanesian canoe carry us forward into the unknown future with much confidence and hope.

The Melanesian canoe stands for the order that we need. The chief who steers the canoe symbolically represents Christ, who directs his Body, the Church, and guides it through the dark frailties, mockeries, belittlement, sickness, corruption, disadvantage, brutality and revulsion because of jealousy.

You, as ministers of the church, are the rudder by which God in Christ steers his Body along the social and political water of this world. The sail is the faith of the Church expressed in prayer and worship and the wind is of course the Spirit. It is the Spirit that enables the church of God to grow and move forward. The Spirit cannot operate in a vacuum. The Spirit needs you, the strength of your faith, your love and commitment to inject spiritual vitality in the ecumenical movement as well as individual church efforts toward justice, peace and love. In the same way, without the sail the Melanesian canoe cannot move forward against the current and would eventually be driven off course; without the faith of the Church, your faith, the Body of Christ will be scattered and fall apart. We sit together inside the canoe as the redeemed ~~of Christ through whose redemption~~ we have been reconciled to God. Let us therefore be reconciled to one another and help to steady our Melanesian canoe of justice, peace and love.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> This is not bias against the female gender in any way. Any restrictions imposed on females by the culture are there to serve as protective measures against men with evil motives. Women must be protected from sexual abuse since a woman's body is sacred as it bears children who build the community and extend the clan. In Melanesia culture understands woman as biologically developed and structurally designed for peace, not for violence.

<sup>2</sup> Part of the other or closely connected to ...

<sup>3</sup> This is important to note because it is believed that violence and hatred are signs of the presence of the evil one in the community and can cause harm to children. The chief must therefore brace himself against the forces of evil.

<sup>4</sup> The sacrificial death form of compensation in Santa Cruz where it used to be practiced is no longer practiced today. This involved the public shooting of an innocent boy or in some cases to compensate a murder.

<sup>5</sup> Festivals

<sup>6</sup> David J. Atkinson and David H. Field, Eds. New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), 15.

<sup>7</sup> Atkinson, 10

<sup>8</sup> Leaders who are politically, economically and socially pastoral in developing justice oriented policies that can provide maximum socio-economic services to God's people in Melanesia.

<sup>9</sup> A governing system that recognizes God and upholds the Melanesian Culture.







*The Melanesian Brothers during their presentation  
at the Melanesian Contextual Theology Seminar*



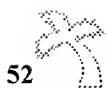
**Bro. Richard Carter**

*Brother Richard Carter, Chaplain  
of the Melanesian Brotherhood.*

## In Search of the Lost

### *A Reflection on the Martyrdom of Seven Melanesian Brothers*

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of August 2003 Christians throughout the world were shocked to hear the tragic news the six Melanesian Brothers had been murdered on the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal. For three months the Melanesian Brotherhood and members of our Church had been waiting and hoping and praying that these Brothers were alive and would return safely. But on the 8<sup>th</sup> August our worst fears were confirmed. The Melanesian Brotherhood was officially told by the Police Commissioner, William Morrell, that they had been informed by the Guadalcanal militant leader, Harold Keke, that all six were dead. These were brave, talented and greatly loved men and it has been hard for us to come to terms with the greatness of their loss and the tragic ending of such good, young and holy lives. The Archbishop of Melanesian, the Most Revd. Ellison Pogo wrote: "The Melanesian Brotherhood has never taken sides in any dispute and has never been the judge of any person. The Brotherhood has simply tried to follow our Lord Jesus Christ, to witness to the Gospel and to bring peace and reconciliation."



From 1999 onwards the Melanesian Brotherhood alongside the other religious communities had been in the front line of peace making. With a Police Force that many felt at that time they could not depend on, many turned to the Melanesian Brotherhood for help and support when their lives and property were threatened. The work of the Melanesian Brotherhood thus involved camping between the enemy lines and trying each day to stop the fighting, it involved helping the displaced and the wounded, the elderly and the children. It involved trying to locate the bodies of the dead so they could be returned to grieving relatives. It meant they had to be present with families who were living in fear, uniting those who had been divided, returning property that had been stolen, freeing hostages and protecting the victims of violence. During this time they often went where no one else was prepared to go, answering needs no one else was prepared to answer. And they did this for both sides because they did not serve one ethnic group or another, or 'politics, or self' but because they believed they must serve God and love their neighbour. And until the tragic events of the last few months no brother himself was ever harmed. But the cost of true discipleship as the apostles and martyrs show us is sometimes very great.

On Pentecost 2002 it was decided in a meeting of the Brothers at Tabalia that the Melanesian Brotherhood must help in collecting guns for the guns were causing such injustices and social unrest in the nation. The Melanesian Brothers decided with one mind that there could be no chance of true peace in the nation unless the guns were destroyed. During the next five months the response to the Brothers' call for guns to be returned was so great. The Melanesian Brotherhood worked to disarm all sides and this included guns held illegally by members of the police force, Malaitans, Guadalcanal or anyone else holding weapons. The many guns, bullets and bombs handed over to the Brotherhood were taken out to deep sea and sunk in the presence of The Police Commissioner, so that they can never be used again.

By 2003 it was increasingly obvious that the situation on the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal was growing worse. Harold Keke (The

Guadalcanal Liberation Front Leader and his followers) based on the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal, had not given up his guns and many Malaitans used this as their excuse for refusing to hand over theirs. There was a culture of fear in which few were brave enough to speak out but rumours of the atrocities taking place on the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal reached Honiara including the murder of Fr. Augustine Gave, a retired Roman Catholic Priest. Many of those whom Keke suspected of complicity with the government or betrayal of his cultish cause were tortured or executed including his own followers. The Solomon Island Police Force were poorly equipped and without the trust or expertise to deal with the Weather Coast situation and had enlisted the support of Keke's opponents and this joint operation was causing its own problems. There were accusations of the burning down of villages and human rites abuses on both sides. The majority of the Weather Coast people including women and children were confused and afraid, caught between Harold Keke's militants and a joint operation militia which many did not trust.

Brother Nathaniel Sado, the first of the Melanesian Brothers to be murdered, had gone to visit Keke in February 2003 with two other Brothers. They took with them a letter from the Anglican Archbishop Ellison Pogo to try and open up a dialogue for peace and try and bring an end to the atrocities in which so many innocent people were suffering. It was obvious at this stage that the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force did not have the numbers, capability or support to re-establish the rule of law and order. Brother Nathaniel knew Keke well and had worked with his brother during the disarmament period. He naively believed that he could help to bring peace. When the other two Brothers unable to meet with Keke returned, Br. Nathaniel, against their advice, decided to stay. He made the mistake of believing Keke would not harm him. On Easter day one of Keke's followers who had escaped from him ran away to Mbabanakira and reported on SIBC news that Brother Nathaniel Sado had been murdered. When the Brothers heard the news of this death they were deeply shocked and unsure whether it was true. While the Melanesian Brotherhood had always tried to advocate for others now there was no one to advocate for them.



On April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2003, six Brothers led by the Assistant Head Brother, Robin Lindsay, who was responsible for the welfare of the Brothers in the Solomon Island Region left Honiara by canoe for the Weather Coast. Their mission, as authorized by the Archbishop, was to visit the Brotherhood Households on the Weather Coast to find out what had happened to Brother Nathaniel and if his death was confirmed to try and bring his body back for burial. The other five Brothers who went with him were Brothers Francis Tofi, Tony Sirihi, Alfred Hill, Patteson Gatu and Ini Paratabatu.

The Brothers arrived on the Weather Coast and walked inland towards Keke's village. They came upon a group of Keke's followers (Keke was not with them) who attacked them and killed Brothers Robin Lindsay, Francis Tofi and Alfred Hill when they refused to lie face down on the ground. The other three Brothers were taken back to Keke's camp where after a night of humiliation and torture they were lined up in front of a single grave and shot in the chest, falling into the grave. Those who were later arrested for their murders told that they were killed because they were considered to be government spies who had come without permission from Keke.

When the Brothers did not return after three months of waiting, vigil and prayer began in which negotiations with Keke for their release continued. Keke claimed all these hostages were still alive and were being held as prisoners of war. In the meantime Keke took more Brothers and Novices hostages - five Novices and two Brothers were held for more than a month. These seven were all released unharmed. In fact Keke had asked them to pray with him and preach to his men. When they were later released he sent them back with gifts of shell money and pigs for the Melanesian Brotherhood. A week after their release in a meeting with The Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) Keke announced that the seven Brothers originally held were dead and had been killed on arrival. He also agreed to an unconditional surrender and the laying down of the arms of his followers. So came the hope of peace but for the Melanesian Brotherhood at great cost.

## Reflection While Waiting for the Brothers to Return

*The following are a few entries from my diary.... Eastertide as the Melanesian Brothers wait in vigil and prayer for news of their Brothers' taken hostage.*

*May 10<sup>th</sup> 2.00a.m. Grounded by tragedy.*

But Easter is here and underneath our altar the Easter candle shines on the white pebbles of the empty tomb and clover hill laced with white frangipanis of the Easter garden we have built. It is here kneeling in the dark, watching the fragile flickering candle that I weigh out the tragedy of Brother Nathaniel's death and long for our six Brothers to return. Self-sacrifice in history seems clearer and untangled but here in my subconscious it is painful confusing and filled with fear. And the blame starts and the regret and the constant rerun of events, their goodness and the sickening powerlessness of knowing they may be suffering and there is no one to help. All pride and confidence has burst and we are on our knees, touching the earth again, humbled and in the hands of God alone. And mingled with all the sorrow and longing here is the knowledge that here truth is to be found. The pace slows, the tiredness of this wait comes and each small daily duty becomes more difficult to perform. I see the Brothers and Novices faithfully praying through the darkness, silent and still and I take courage from this presence. Somehow in the midst of this confusion we are centred again: we have one heart and one mind, the heart and mind of longing and hoping for our Brothers and none of our lives make sense unless we hold to Christ. And so it is both the passion and the resurrection all at once. There is only God now and we thirst for him – longing for the time when I can sit in the mouth of this tomb where my six Brothers have led me and know the resurrection. The whole of our community is waiting here outside the tomb, pivoting between death and resurrection: the warring mosquitoes soaring round my ears, the joints aching, the desire to go, the desire to stay, the longing to pray deeper, harder, more powerfully, the desire in all of me for



these prayers to be answered: that the whine of the outboard motor in the night will be their home coming, that the engine in the distance is a truck bringing news ..... that they have been there into the world of the dead and converted that world too. I imagine them singing the offices into the darkness of the night. If anything can awaken the hearts of Keke and his men, it is the love and faith of these Brothers. But can the lamb really lead the wolf home?

*August 9<sup>th</sup> 2003 Yesterday our worst fears were confirmed.*

The Melanesian Brotherhood was officially told by the Police Commissioner William Morrell that they had been informed by Keke that all six were dead. It is hard for such news to sink in. These were six young innocent Brothers who went out in faith and in love in search of their Brother. It seems too much to bear that they should have been murdered in cold blood. I would like to tell you a little about each one of them for each one will be so missed:

Brother Robin Lindsay is our Assistant Head brother and has been in the community for many years. He was four years Assistant Head Brother in Solomon Islands and four years Head Brother in PNG. I call him "the encourager" because he has time for everyone and helps build on their strengths. He is known and popular wherever he goes in PNG and Solomon Islands and even Norfolk in the UK. With his strong handshake and absolute dedication to his work the community feels in safe and caring hands whenever he is around. He is so greatly loved, how much he will be missed. My last memory of him is on Maunday Thursday when together we washed the feet of the Novices in the community: he washing and I drying.

Brother Francis Tofi from the time he was a Novice was so bright and attentive in all his studies. When you meet him you know straight away that here is someone with a deep spiritual life and gentle wisdom. He asked constant questions and understood intuitively what it meant to be a Brother. First in Malaita and then on the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal at the time of tension and its aftermath he showed incredible courage. Here was a Brother who was prepared to speak

out, to condemn violence and the use of weapons and protect the lives of others even at great personal danger. It was Brother Francis who had organized for the Police Commissioner and a few of the Brothers to go out by canoe and dispose of all the many high powered weapons, explosives and ammunition the Brothers had collected and sunk them in the deep sea so they could never be used again. There are stories of how he was able to resolve conflicts and rescue those who were being beaten or in danger from the rebels. Early this year the World Council of Churches offered him a place at the Bossey Institute in Geneva to study and contribute to a course on conflict resolution. I was aware of the possible danger he was in working for disarmament and particularly because he had not been afraid to speak out against Keke. But his courage was very great. He told me he was not frightened of dying in God's service and in his work for peace. I reminded him that God wants LIVING sacrifices and he had his whole life ahead of him. We laughed for death never really seems a possibility in one so brave and full of life. I told him I wanted to visit him in Geneva. Today we packed his only possessions in a small grubby black rucksack. A few shirts, a couple of pairs of shorts, his uniform and some books to return to his family. I cannot believe he is dead.

Brother Alfred Hilly. He is a young and humble Brother; for two years he has been looking after Chester Rest house in Honiara. Sometimes the guests find him a bit quiet and vague but he has great kindness: always giving up his bed and mattress to provide extra room for guests. He takes particular care of the kids who love coming to the house. He makes sure they get fed at lunchtime and has been helping young Selwyn, whose parents have deserted him, learn to read. This year he trained in malaria research and qualified to read blood slides at the local clinic. This has been so helpful to all the religious communities who bring their blood slides to him for the fast diagnosis of malaria. And now dead. How can I write in the past tense about one so young?

Brother Ini Paratabatu, free spirited and outspoken, brave and full of energy. He is a brilliant actor and became a key member of my dramas and joined me on the Brothers mission and tour to New Zealand





in 2000. Before joining the community he worked in the drama group of Solomon Islands Development Trust performing dramas about development and health issues. We got on well for he knew I recognized his potential and the fire within him. Ini as a Brother has been brave to speak out against all injustice. He even confronted the SI Police Force when he believed their methods were unjust, brutal or failing to respect the rights of the people.

Brother Patteson Gatu. He is full of joy and so motivated as a new Brother. He was only admitted last October and always smiles from ear to ear when you meet him. The last time I saw him just before Easter he was telling me about when he was fired at while trying to land on the beach as well as enthusing about a sermon I had just preached. I was never quite sure whether he was teasing! He had such youth and warmth and confidence of faith; not some narrow religiosity but natural and real and strong. Indeed he made Christ's beatitude a reality: 'Happy are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God' (Mat. 5:9).

And Brother Tony Sirihi, who lost his father when he was young and found in the Brotherhood a real family and home. He developed from a shy, thin and humble Novice into a stocky and bold Brother. But he never lost his simplicity. So many memories. I remember so clearly the night before he was admitted as a Brother - how we climbed "Pentecost Mountain" together and celebrated the Eucharist on top with all those about to make their vows. All night Tony had been lighting fires to keep us warm. I remember taking a retreat with him on a desert island in Lord Howe in which we fended off clouds of mosquitoes all night. He was easy company and a natural and unassuming friend to many of the Brothers who loved having him around. He showed his courage throughout the tension and continued to help the disarmament process.

And Brother Nathaniel Sado, the lost Brother, for whom they had gone in search. As a Novice he was in charge of the piggery and cared for those pigs as if they were members of his own family! He made a sweet potato garden for them and cooked for them. They often seemed better fed than the rest of the Novices. The dogs followed him around

too and he was one of the few Novices who got on well with our donkey. He loved to welcome guests to the community and made friends with many of the expatriates arranging trips for them to this home volcanic island of Savo where he took them up the mountain to see the hot springs and sulphur smoke and to dig for megapode eggs in the warm sand. He delighted in these expeditions. He had had little formal education and had a somewhat child like nature always on the move and as a Brother a bit hard to pin down. During the tension and the disarmament he had made friends with the militant group and was rather proud of the fact that he knew Harold Keke and believed Keke to be his friend. The trust was misplaced and he was the first Brother to die. Stories say that he was beaten to death after being accused by Keke of being a spy for the government. But there was no guile or deception in this young man; naive perhaps, proud of his status as a Brother and the *kudos* of mixing with the militants but entirely well meaning and innocent.

Of one thing I am certain these seven men will live on in the hearts and minds of our community. Their sacrifice seems too great and hard to believe. The community sat up at night telling the stories of these Brothers through the night and trying to come to terms with the enormity of their loss. And yet beneath the trauma there is a peace too. The knowledge that each of these young men believed in peace and in goodness. They knew that there was a better way. They were prepared to oppose violence and to risk much. At the end of the day they stand against all acts of brutality, which are at present disfiguring our world and bravely, boldly, and with love, lived what most of us proclaim only from the safety of a church. Oh how much the world wide Anglican Church at the moment could learn from their witness. And when such real life issues are so much at stake in our world is not this what the Gospel should be?



*August 21<sup>st</sup> I see the opposites most clearly now - cruelty and death side by side with love and life.*

Both have traces of the other. Love undermines cruelty, opposes and threatens it; it lets the light in upon the atrocity and longs to heal but love too is tainted by fear, the dread of losing and hurting and being separated from the beloved. Love opposed by fear and hatred. There is a simple choice here and again I know which to choose, setting the fibres in me free to live again. The Brothers' brutal death has gentleness in its aftermath. As though the struggle for them is over and they have made their choice and made that last terrible journey and have reached the other side: "Good and faithful servants, come and enjoy my kingdom".

*September 11 From around the world, the Melanesian Brotherhood in the aftermath received messages of prayer and encouragement.*

The story of the Brothers had touched the hearts of many. How strange, that in the finality of these young deaths we glimpse something life giving. As one of those who wrote to us said, "I think it is your testimony that six, good, humble and faithful men died because they were so devoted to one another and to Christ that, simultaneously causes me so much pain but also affords such hope."

Among the many tributes we have received was one written by a writer Charles Montgomery from Canada who had spent time with our community last year writing a book which explores his own journey to discover the meaning of the myths and faith he encountered in Melanesia. His words have the spirit of these Brothers: "Only yesterday, I was writing about Brother Francis Tofi. I remember our trip to CDCI; how he was the one who huddled in the back of the truck, he was the one who whispered and chuckled and remained very small, so small that I decided he was not central to the days' events, until the moment came during a tense negotiation for the release of a kidnapped boy, when Francis stepped forward and brought the two enemy groups together in prayer. He radiated something so good and true and bigger than the moment and the tension was washed from the afternoon, and the men with anger and guns were made humble. And of course a

boy's life was saved and a gun was retrieved. I hope you do not think I am throwing platitudes at you when I say I am certain the Brothers will become larger in their deaths, and their cause must certainly ripple outwards. I know this cannot ease the pain of losing such friends and brothers in your journey. But even as a man with little faith, I am certain of it. It is happening for me already.

And now we return to our lives. There is a long way to go and somehow the community seems older and wiser, hushed by the events which have overtaken us but not without hope or joy. It is as if the paschal mystery has been lived out amongst us, not a recreation but the reality of our faith and though I pray that I never have to go through an event like this ever again, it is as though we have been given a glimpse through the mystery of things. We have seen the brutal face of evil and known the fear and darkness it brings but we have also witnessed goodness and love and glimpsed the promise of that which is eternal and all of us know which side we want to belong to. The seven Brothers are a constant aching reminder of the integrity, values and love which alone can bring hope to our world.

## Reflection after the Burial

*Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> November*

All seven martyred Brothers lie together at the Motherhouse of the Melanesian Brothers at Tabalia. The day of their funeral was declared a national day of mourning. Thousands lined the roads and gathered at Tabalia to witness their coffins go past and their burial and their funeral service was broadcast to the nation.

Our Assistant Head Brother, Robin Lindsay from Papua New Guinea was laid to rest beside the six Solomon Island Brothers with whom he had died and who had been buried on the 24 October. There was a great sense of peace in the community as on Wednesday night we lit candles and sang around the seven new graves.



I waited at the airport for Brother Francis Tofi's father and mother to arrive from Makira. I had not seen this tall strong Tikopian and former Brother since his son's admission as a Brother in 1999 when he had worn traditional tapa cloth (bark) dress and had such pride in his son who would take on a ministry he had left off twenty years before. Now arriving at the airport he looked so frail; and bent with grief. He put his arms round me and sobbed and his cry entered into me and I was crying too; for this wonderful son of his and the senseless, senseless brutality that had led to the death of someone so good. Francis's father had been fasting since he heard of his son's kidnapping in April. Around his neck he had hung Francis's faded black Brother's shirt into which he cried continuously. This was just but one of seven families' grief. What I still find impossible to understand is the failure of imagination, or compassion, or heart with which people can commit atrocities without perceiving the suffering caused. Perhaps they do perceive and that is the horror of human cruelty, where pain is mocked, torture is sport and the inhuman takes on a diabolic logic of its own.

Yet the funeral somehow contained this pain and transcended it. It really did. The full community of Brothers and Novices in white stood at the bottom of the hill, which leads to our Motherhouse at Tabalia. Behind them a huge crowd from the Governor General to village children waiting for the arrival home of their beloved brothers. As one by one the coffins were unloaded from three trucks the wailing of the crowd grew louder and broke ranks and pushed towards the coffins. Yet the Brothers, with such dignity and inner strength one by one took up the coffins from the RAMSI combined police force who handed them over and a long huge procession began up the hill to the chapel. In front of each coffin a banner, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the sons of God", and the name of the Brother who had given his life in the cause of peace. In the chapel the crying was silenced by the singing of the community. A deep silence, a love which transcends the words spoken and found expression in the harmony of voices. Brothers placed the Brotherhood medals and sashes on the coffins with such respect and then the families came forward with wreaths and flowers. As we moved towards the Brotherhood

graveyard there was a huge surge of grief among the huge crowd and yet again this Brotherhood-like bulwarks against this ocean of loss held the chaos of grief together, gave it a form and a structure and a dignity: the Holy Spirit hovering over the waters of chaos bringing into being a new creation. And I was struck as many of us were, not by a morbid darkness but by faith and light.

That night the late Francis Tofi's father called me to the house he was staying. He told me he had buried his grief in the grave with his son and now he would eat again. He bent low over my hands and breathed on them. And I knew that the miracle of God's life was beginning again. It gave me such joy to eat fish with him. He is such a dignified beautiful old man. And it is the love for his son which so shines in him and I remind him this can never die for it is of God and eternal.

Yet our community could still not fully rest even as we celebrated with such joy two days later the admission of 48 new Brothers who took their promises in the Square where 78 years ago the founder of the Melanesian Brotherhood took his promises. Our first Filipino Brother, Alejandro, led the cheers, which followed the celebration of their admission and gave such an effervescent and bubbling speech about his gratitude at being a Brother. The community, quieter than usual but with a seeming greater depth and wisdom celebrated but continued to patiently wait for the final decision of the family of the late Robin Lindsay of whether he too could be buried alongside his Brothers at Tabalia. Robin's grave remained open and waiting and there could be no closure for any of us before he too was laid to rest.

On Monday 3 November eight of Brother Robin's closest relatives had arrived from PNG. They met at Tabalia and late in the evening called the leaders of the community to tell them that the final decision had already been made. Brother Robin's bones would be "planted" at Tabalia. It had been a hard and costly decision for the family for we all felt Brother Robin belonged to us. Yet his sister Nancy knew the truth he was first and foremost a Brother and he



belonged to God and so should rest with those he led at the heart of the community he served.

The delay had seemed painful and yet it was again completely right for it allowed for a funeral that gave special respect for Robin as our leader and his family from PNG to be fully involved. Although we had only 24 hours to arrange the seventh and final funeral everything came into place as though it was always meant to be. The Governor General, the Prime Minister, Ministers, the Police Commissioner and Members of the Regional Intervention Force, the PNG High Commission and hundreds of others were here as the Archbishop and Father of the Brotherhood officiated but the whole of Brother Robin's life was reflected. His Auntie Prisca told the story of his life; his uncle declared bravely that he forgave his nephew's murderers but called upon them to repent and lift the curse of violence from these Islands. The Prime Minister praised Brother Robin and the Brotherhood for their work for peace; and the Archbishop told Brother Robin's family that they had given the Church the very best, the most precious offering they had: their own beloved son and Brother. But perhaps the most powerful sign of all was when all the Brothers and Novices gathered to kneel around the coffin to show their last respects, linked to the coffin and to one another by outstretched hands, their grief, their faith and the song they sang. And then together as one community they slowly lifted the coffin onto the shoulders of 6 of their Brothers to be led to his final resting place where his relatives sang in his mother tongue.

A month before he was murdered Brother Robin came to me to ask me about a dream that he had had three times. He told me he dreamt he was on a beach and that he looked up and saw the most terrible storm clouds and cyclone approaching and huge waves mounting. He was full of fear and dreamt that the storm engulfed him. He said he was drowned and that everything was swept away by the waves. He dreamt that the waves carried him to the top of a mountain and that as the water receded he was in warm sunshine and that he could see for miles, the world flooded with light. He said that he heard that he must not be afraid and that all would be well, all would be made good. I told him he had a lot on his plate on the moment with

a coming conference and not to worry.

How could I know all he was about to face? I did not know the tragedy that awaited him on a beach on April 24<sup>th</sup>. It is only when you stand back from the pain of their loss that you begin to see another story emerging. Who could have imagined the following months - the arrival of the Regional Intervention Force, the unconditional laying down of guns and surrender of militants, the arrest of leading instigators on both sides and for the first time a public no longer frightened to speak out in support of justice? No, no one could have ever imagined the aftermath of these Brother's deaths, nor that the funeral of these simple, humble men of faith would stop the nation and line the streets with thousands of those longing for peace, nor that in churches throughout the world should hold requiems in thanksgiving and prayer for these unknown ordinary deeply loving men of God. And for our community, stripped of all pride and pretensions, a melting down too and we pray new understanding greater compassion, and a still deeper heart for the Gospel.

## Final Thoughts

The Brothers' decision to go in search of Nathaniel is one many of us would fear making. But it showed the kind of men these Brothers were and it showed their love for God and their people. They all knew the danger of their mission and yet they had decided themselves in prayer to face that danger. Why did they go? It seems too great a sacrifice for anyone to make. They went because they believed the Gospel, not just in word but also in the action of their lives. They believed that the Good Shepherd must go in search of the one who is lost. They believed that the Good Shepherd must be willing even to give up his life for the sheep. We profess a Gospel, which at its heart proclaims a love, a love so great that God is prepared to send his only Son who will die for that love. That is how costly that love is. The action of these brothers challenges us deeply.



Yet to those of us who stayed behind God's resurrection must be ours too. For redemption is not simply in death but in this world too. A longer struggle perhaps, one requiring love, courage and faithfulness and a deep commitment to peace and justice which I pray will be our martyred Brothers' lasting gift for us.

The Members of the Melanesian Brotherhood would like to thank all those who have helped and supported them through this time. We would especially like to thank the Police Commissioner William Morrell and all the members of the Regional Intervention Force who made it possible for us to bring our departed Brothers back to Tabalia where they could be buried with respect and dignity and continue to work for peace and justice in the Solomon Islands.

## March 2004

Solomons Islands is a place where it is much easier in many ways to confront life's mysteries because one is in touch with them constantly. There are no defences or modern conveniences to separate you from the elements: so when it rains you get wet, and when the floods come you get hungry because there is less food, and like today we are skidding about the sliding through mud with bare feet and rushing around picking and squeezing bush limes with 4kg of sugar for 64 Novices who have flu' and that's how the morning is spent. And when friends die you are very much part of that too. No undertakers, no crematoriums just the bare earth and a hole you have watched your brothers dig and this fragile life of ours being lowered down and taken up into something greater and beyond our understanding, but held together, very much connected.

This whole event was like entering into the greatest drama one has ever witnessed or conceived of and the drama was real and I kept hoping it wasn't and it went on for a day after day, so that you were inside it and outside it and longing for it to find a reconciliation and then like a tragedy suddenly realizing that all was changed unalterably

and nothing would ever be the same, and there was no way possible of ever going back or bringing back but that in the place you expected to find bitterness and dread instead there was alongside the loss a deeper humanity. And in this you know where you belong and what things you believe in and all the appendages and props and facades and nonsense are seen for what they are: and there you are face to face with what you are: naked as it were, without pride or delusions but human, and there, and you are not alone but there are others there with you and strangely you are no longer afraid. I love being there with my community. It is much harder in many ways being back in UK where everything seems distant and removed and death seemed like a terribly bleak alien and anonymous thief, which has no relationship with the modern world rather than something we knew intimately. The death of these Brothers was more like a painful birth than a death.



## Melanesian Contextual Theology Conference

*Lessons Learnt from Indigenous Methods of Peacemaking  
in Solomon Islands with Particular Reference to the Role  
of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Religious  
Communities*

The Melanesian Brotherhood, the Society of St. Francis, the Sisters of the Church and the Sisters of Melanesia are all Anglican religious communities. Each member of these communities takes the religious vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Living a lifestyle of simplicity, prayer and service they aim to live out the Gospel in a direct way. The Melanesian Brotherhood is the largest male Anglican religious community within the worldwide Anglican Church. It is an indigenous community founded in 1925 by a man from Guadalcanal, Ini Kopuria, and it now numbers more than 400 brothers working in Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and most recently the Philippines and the United Kingdom. The ethos of the community is to live the religious life but in a Melanesian, indigenous way. Thus their way of life tries to reflect many of the strengths of Melanesian tradition. There is an emphasis on working together, fishing, and growing gardens for self-support. It is a community, which has acculturated the Christian message both in its Christian faith, and also in its collective lifestyle and dependence upon one another, the environment and the blessings of God rather than

**Brothers Alfred Jude  
and Richard Carter**

*Bro. Alfred Jude, Head Brother  
and Bro. Richard Carter,  
Chaplain of the Melanesian  
Brotherhood.*

on individualism, competition or the desire for private profit. Even their religious vows reflect Melanesian culture for they take temporary rather than life vows for an initial period of three and then a further four years. Thus after a period of service they are free to leave the Brotherhood and return to their villages and the Brotherhood honours the important place marriage and family life holds in the community, rather than demanding lifelong celibacy. The Melanesian Brotherhood aims to reach out to the wider community, inclusively welcoming all who come to visit, sharing their resources, offering manpower and support and showing care and respect for the wider community. Reciprocally they are respected by Melanesians for their sacrificial lifestyle and service and are supported with food, prayer and offerings by many people.

All the Anglican religious communities have their headquarters in the area of rural Guadalcanal controlled during the conflict by Isatambu Freedom Movement (IFM) but also households in Honiara that became controlled by MEF. Thus the religious communities found themselves bridging the war zone, divided by the broken bridges, road blocks and check points of the two opposing militant groups. Throughout the conflict, when schools, colleges, villages, even families divided against each other on ethnic lines, in contrast each one of these communities managed to maintain their unity: Malaitans living side by side with Guadalcanal brothers and sisters on both Guadalcanal and Malaita. What is more, most of the militants themselves did not seem to discriminate against or judge according to island or tribe. They were considered first and foremost religious brothers and sisters with an allegiance to God and to all Melanesians. This was an astonishing recognition in such an ethnic conflict where the opposing island groups were treated often with hatred and suspicion.

The first response of these religious communities was a humanitarian one. We had to do something to help those who were suffering.

As Malaitan villages were destroyed and the Malaitan settlers



displaced Tabalia (the Headquarters of the Melanesian Brotherhood) to the west of Honiara and Tetenikolivuti (the headquarters of the Sisters of the Church) to the east of Honiara, became places of refuge for Malaitans driven from their homes.

IFM respected the sacredness of these places and the community stations were places where no militant from either side would invade or defile. The communities were able to safeguard the Malaitans seeking refuge and transport them to Honiara. On the only time IFM chased a group of Malaitans into Tabalia, the leader of the IFM quickly controlled his men and apologized for failing to respect the Headquarters.

During the height of the tension it was only the religious communities to whom the militants allowed freedom of movement – the trucks of the religious communities passing freely through the roadblocks and check points of both the MEF and the IFM.

The religious communities were able to help the displaced Malaitans get safely to Honiara and therefore prevent some of the violence that could have developed. At the same time we tried to be impartial and not to take sides. It was not long before the IFM needed help from the religious communities and sanctuary when their own villages and homes were threatened by MEF and they were unable to get medicines and important supplies through the Honiara roadblocks. And so we tried to help the innocent on both sides especially women and children although we were sometimes falsely accused by both sides of helping their enemies.

In Honiara our religious communities remained places of sanctuary where the Brothers' authority was respected and those who ran away to these houses were safe. Therefore the Religious Communities became both in rural Guadalcanal and Honiara the only places which people felt were safe and could be trusted to help either side.

There were hundreds of requests for the religious communities. Brothers and Sisters were stretched to the very limits. People needed them to search for relatives, to reunite divided families. We were asked to look for children. We were asked to pick up property and possessions they had left behind in the displacement and to protect the threatened and to transport family members to safety. Many families and marriages were divided by tribe or island and once again it was the religious communities whom people wanted to help reconcile these divisions and disputes.

Eventually the communities, especially the Melanesian Brotherhood, decided that they must become more directly involved to prevent further violence, killing and suffering. At the Melanesian Brotherhood Great Conference at Tabalia in October 1999 we elected a Malaitan Head brother and an Assistant Head brother from Guadalcanal. In the middle of this tension it was an important and symbolic move. This new Head Brother Harry Gereniu expressed the belief that the community and ethnic unity of the Brotherhood must move out from Tabalia and be taken into the conflict zone. In May 2000 the Brothers chose and commissioned a team of brothers to directly work for peace; these Brothers moved into the no-man's land between the roadblocks of the opposing militants and spread out to visit and to try to pacify those directly involved in the growing violence. Their message was a simple one and the following is an extract from a letter they took to the militants on both sides.

In the Name of Jesus Christ, we appeal to you: stop the killing, stop the hatred, stop the pay back. Those people you kill or you hate are your own Solomon Island brothers. Blood will lead to more blood, hatred will lead to greater hatred and we will all become the prisoners of the evil we do. Stop this ethnic tension before more innocent people suffer.<sup>1</sup>

The brothers continued to camp between enemy lines for the next four months moving backwards and forwards between the militant groups, talking to them, trying to calm them, praying with them, trying

to lessen false stories and suspicion which generates between factions in such a context. And they forbade, in the name of God, either side to advance beyond their barricades. Similarly the brothers visited the camps of both the MEF and IFM where the training was taking place and prisoners were being held and tortured. By their words and presence they sought and were often successful in reminding the militants to use peaceful ways and to awaken Christian conscience to stop torture and violence. The Melanesian Brothers also became involved in negotiating the release of hostages taken by the rival factions, most notably a Solomon Islands Airlines pilot who had been taken prisoner on the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal.

The Sisters of the Church in particular worked very bravely trying to get supplies through the roadblocks to families and children. They also carried the displaced, the wounded and the dead. Brothers carried the corpses of victims across the checkpoints to return them to grieving relatives for proper burial. They also investigated the deaths of those missing, even digging up the bodies so that they could be identified and their remains returned. The work of the religious communities was indeed very hard and painful. We Brothers actually involved have described how, as the conflict developed, there was no glory; we have been left with painful memories we find it difficult to forget. One Brother after witnessing two violent murders said to me:

After this I felt so angry. Why had they done these things? I felt suspicious of everyone. I was afraid to speak to anyone about what I had seen. I could not forgive what I had seen. I felt unable to eat and tried to forget so I could feel peaceful again” My whole body felt sick at the terrible evil things I had seen done to another person.

When the Townsville Peace Agreement was signed, the Melanesian Brotherhood and the other religious communities shared in the celebrations. But as we were to learn the problems were far from over. The Melanesian Brotherhood were asked to work with the Peace Monitoring Council but we withdrew after only three months as we found the way of life we were being drawn into did not fit with our

religious way of life or our life as a religious community. In 2001 increasingly the religious communities were being called upon to become the security for commercial property and people, a role that depleted their manpower. Those who felt threatened requested Melanesian Brothers to stay at their homes. Even Qantas Airlines wanted Melanesian Brothers present for their aeroplanes to land at Henderson. After the events of 2003 it is easy to say that the Melanesian Brotherhood had become too involved in protection and security of people and property but at the time there was no one else for people to turn to. Even the new Police Commissioner requested Melanesian Brothers accompany him on his tour of familiarization for he felt they could help build trust with the grassroots Solomon Islanders.

Later in 2002 approaches were made to the Melanesian Brotherhood to become involved in the disarmament process. On Pentecost 2002 it was decided in a meeting of the Brothers at Tabalia that the Melanesian Brotherhood must help in collecting guns for the guns were causing such injustices and social unrest in the nation. The Melanesian Brothers decided with one mind that there could be no chance of true peace in the nation unless the guns were destroyed. During the next five months the response to the Brothers' call for guns to be returned was so great. The Melanesian Brotherhood worked to disarm all sides and this included guns held illegally by members of the police force, Malaitans, Guadalcanal or anyone else holding weapons. The many guns, bullets and bombs handed over to the Brotherhood were taken out to deep sea and sunk in the presence of the Police Commissioner, so that they can never be used again.

By 2003 it was increasingly obvious that the situation on the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal was growing worse. Harold Keke (The Guadalcanal Liberation Front Leader and his followers) based on the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal, had not given up his guns and many Malaitans used this as their excuse for refusing to hand over theirs. There was a culture of fear in which few were brave enough to speak out but rumours of the atrocities taking place on the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal reached Honiara including the murder of Fr. Augustine





Gave, a retired Roman Catholic Priest. Many of those whom Keke suspected to complicity with the government or betrayal of his cause were tortured or executed including his own followers. The Solomon Island Police Force were poorly equipped and without the trust or expertise to deal with the Weather Coast situation and had enlisted the support of Keke's opponents and this joint operation was causing its own problems. There were accusations of the burning down of villages and human rights abuses on both sides. The majority of the Weather Coast people including women and children were confused and afraid, caught between Harold Keke's militants and a joint operation militia which many did not trust.

Brother Nathaniel Sado, the first of the Melanesian Brothers to be murdered, had gone to visit Keke in February 2003 with two other Brothers. They took with them a letter from the Anglican Archbishop Ellison Pogo to try and open up a dialogue for peace to try and bring an end to the atrocities in which so many innocent people were suffering. When the other two Brothers unable to meet with Keke returned, Br. Nathaniel, against their advice, decided to stay. He made the mistake of believing Keke would not harm him. On Easter day one of Keke's followers who had escaped from him and run away to Mbabanakira reported on SIBC news that Brother Nathaniel Sado had been murdered. When the Brothers heard the news of this death they were deeply shocked and unsure whether it was true. While the Melanesian Brotherhood had always tried to advocate for others now there was no one to advocate for them.

On April 23 2003, six Brothers led by the Assistant Head Brother Robin Lindsay, who was responsible for the welfare of the Brothers in the Solomon Island Region, left Honiara by canoe for the Weather Coast. Their mission, as authorized by the Archbishop, was to visit the Brotherhood Households on the Weather Coast to find out what had happened to Brother Nathaniel and if his death was confirmed to try and bring his body back for burial. The other five Brothers who went with him were Brothers Francis Tofi, Tony Sirihi, Alfred Hill, Patteson Gatu and Ini Paratabatu.

The Brothers arrived on the Weather Coast and walked inland towards Keke's village. They came upon a group of Keke's followers (Keke was not with them) who attacked them and killed Brother Robin Lindsay, Brother Francis Tofi and Brother Alfred Hill when they refused to lie face down on the ground. The other three Brothers were taken back to Keke's camp where, after humiliation and torture, they were lined up in front of a single grave and shot in the chest, falling into the grave.

When the Brothers did not return after three months of waiting, vigil and prayer began in which negotiations with Keke for their release continued. Keke claimed all these hostages were still alive and were being held as prisoners of war. In the meantime Keke took more Brothers and Novices hostages. Five Novices and two Brothers were held for more than a month. These seven were all released unharmed. In fact Keke had asked them to pray with him and preach to his men. When they were later released he sent them back with gifts of shell money and pigs for the Melanesian Brotherhood. A week after their release in a meeting with the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) Keke announced that the seven Brothers originally held were dead and had been killed on arrival. He also agreed to an unconditional surrender and the laying down of the arms of his followers. So came the hope of peace but for the Melanesian Brotherhood at great cost.

### Lessons Learnt from the Indigenous Peace-Making of the Melanesian Brotherhood

What can be learnt by the experience of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the religious communities in the Solomon Islands? Indigenous methods which were successful in conflict resolution and which were employed by the religious communities depended on the following process.

Everyone has a choice. There is a choice for all of us in all of



this. Whether we have the courage to stand strong when all that we believe is threatened or whether we too by our actions or even our silence acquiesce in these acts of violence and death.

The integrity and impartiality of the mediator: The Melanesian Brotherhood became the go-betweens in the conflict. They took the position taken in traditional society by the holy man, the priest, or elder in that they hear the story of both sides. They were considered impartial and men who could be trusted. As the mediators it was vitally important that they were not involved for personal profit or gain but seen to be acting on behalf of both sides and thus the whole reconciled community. When they received rewards for what they did their position was immediately compromised and they lost some of the respect they had gained. When that impartiality was believed to have been compromised then the mediator was in grave danger.

The reconcilers must themselves be reconciled. The brothers represented the restored community in which both divided ethnic groups were represented and seen to be living in unity. Thus the role of peacemaker was not an individual but a community advocating a return to the community they themselves witnessed to by their very existence. Decisions in this peace-making process were made and discussed by the community. Throughout the peace-making there was a strong sense that the work would only be successful if its decisions were made "with one mind of the whole community". This is very different from a western individualistic approach. It required waiting until the whole community felt the time was right and the whole community was unanimous in their support. Melanesians believe that a plan which is embarked upon in hostility and division will not bear good fruit.

The peacemaker belongs to the people. This is not a legalistic process nor one which can be initially conducted by court, police, or government legislation. It involves a face-to-face encounter. The Melanesian Brother enters into the culture of those to whom he goes. He does not go as a judge or as a detached observer but as one who enters into real relationship with the people. People feel at home with

the Brothers. They are familiar with them and their ways. They know that the Brothers will understand their culture. These are peacemakers who eat the same food, respect the customs, understand the way of life of those to whom they go.

The peacemaker must have an indigenous record and history. Their work is known by the people. For years they have been called upon to help in the settling of disputes, marriage problems, sicknesses or family crisis. They have a proven record that people trust and have not just been pulled in at a time of a crisis.

The peacemaker is also seen to have a spiritual role which is honoured and respected. The Melanesian Brothers are seen as being immersed in the Melanesian culture but at the same time above it. They have a prophetic voice. As in traditional society it is believed there is an authority greater than human authority and the indigenous peacemaker is given the right to speak on behalf of that higher authority. Thus the indigenous peacemaker has a confidence in a greater justice, a sense that even if those in conflict fail to listen to the human negotiator there will be an ultimate justice to whom they will have to respond. Ultimately however Harold Keke was to challenge the spiritual authority claiming a greater authority to judge and kill those he feared.

The Melanesian Brother's method of peacemaking acknowledges the spiritual dislocation conflict causes. It recognizes the power of violence and evil to pull the community into its vortex and this it recognizes that reconciliation will involve healing not just physical injury and loss but also spiritual woundedness and the injuries of evil. By externalizing the internal conflict both victim and perpetrator are able to seek repentance, forgiveness and healing and a new beginning. It is no accident that the victims of war and conflict turn towards God to provide answers and hope. The peacemaker does not seek publicity, self honour, or to serve private ends.

The restoration of the community is often seen as more important than individual rights and wrongs. This is one of the hardest lessons



for the expatriate to come to terms with but it is essential in indigenous conflict resolution. What may be judged as a failure to make individuals accountable is in fact an acknowledgement that the community has got to continue living together and there needs to be a way of saving face and returning to the community. In Melanesia criminals are not faceless statistics they are "wontoks", neighbors, those you will meet later in the village, greet and share betelnut with in the market. The emphasis is on the community being powerful and cohesive enough to absorb back into itself those who have rebelled against it without lasting dislocation and shame. In the past this has seemed possible but now the disruption has been so great there is doubt whether the community can ever again contain its errant members.

## Leadership and Authority

If respect and authority is going to return to the chiefs, priests and village elders and to the customs practices of conflict resolution and decision making, then there must be a new inclusiveness in the distribution of authority. Western style education and all the aspirations, which cause and are caused by urban drift, have left their mark on a growing young population. Guns and violence gave young people a taste of power. Unless the younger members of the society are taken into the community decision making processes and empowered, they will remain alienated and potentially rebellious. The Melanesian Brotherhood by attracting and empowering that very disaffected age group, have shown the vitality and potential for this very group to become the community builders.

## True custom

Everyone whom I have spoken to makes a clear and dramatic differentiation between the true use of tradition and custom in conflict resolution which they honour and respect and the misuse of custom which has altered and corrupted its meaning. The former is seen as an act of restoration in which a divided community publicly witness an

act of self giving which restores harmony. The reciprocal giving of gifts to compensate a wrong done restores honour to the aggrieved person or tribe but also honour to the offending person or tribe because by this act of restoration, they restore their own honour. Yet this use of custom has been corrupted by its use for personal profit and gain. Increasingly in the ethnic conflict the language of custom was employed to justify extortion and individual self-interest. It was the exploitation of traditional methods of reconciliation, which denied communities the very tools they needed for community reconciliation.

The peacemaker communicates not just in words but also in symbol and action. Within Melanesian society ceremony, ritual and symbolic action and objects have as much power as words. In the role of peacemaking these actions are vital community signs of rites of passage and of sacred authority to bring change. Thus the presentation of strings of shell money becomes a powerful symbol of covenant and relationship binding together two parties. But similarly in conflict resolution there have been other signs, actions and symbols of the bringing of peace. Those returning guns to the Melanesian Brotherhood washed their hands in blessed "Holy Water". Returned guns were exorcised and prayed over before being destroyed. Similarly Christian signs and symbols are needed to bring healing and forgiveness. Those haunted by memories of their torture needed to be prayed over and the evil they had witnessed driven out by water, prayer and the laying on of hands. The funeral of the seven martyred brothers became in itself part of the symbolism of bringing new life out of their tragic deaths.

The act of conflict resolution is an act of reciprocity, a re-entry into relationship. If custom ceremonies and practices are to bring peace and restoration they cannot be imposed or fabricated. A custom ceremony like a religious marriage ceremony is a three way process between two different parties and God. If it is not entered into with sincerity and trust then it becomes meaningless. Its strength is in the relationship it symbolizes and for it to bring peace these relationships involve a costly giving and self-offering. The symbolic exchange of



gift externalizes an internal exchange of commitment, trust, hope and promise. The government cannot manipulate this on behalf of the people for it must come from the community itself with perhaps government as facilitator or aiding in negotiation: a custom ceremony symbolizes that negotiations have taken place, that understanding a relationship has been restored. It is not the beginning of the process of conflict resolution but the end and the process cannot be short cut however much the government may like to avoid the implications of conflict.

Through the experiences the Melanesian Brotherhood have been through there is a new understanding of the costly nature of their role. It was certainly the death of the seven brothers that brought many to their senses. Those who died and the brothers and novices who ministered on the Weather Coast had in their hearts the enormous suffering the people in the Weather Coast have undergone because of the activities of Keke and his followers. They had in their hearts the need to work for peace in the midst of violence and they did this at great personal cost. They were killed for exercising their Christian ministries. Their deaths have brought the Melanesian Brotherhood and the churches in the Solomon Islands and PNG and beyond the Cross of Christ: away from simple magical understandings of the Brothers power to the terrible sacrifice that is sometimes required of Christians to bring change and to confront the terrible tragedy of human violence, fear and prejudice.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> 'Letter to all those involved in the present ethnic tension' May 2000 A *Resource Book for the Training and Mission of the Melanesian Brotherhood* ed. Richard A. Carter Honiara Provincial Press pp. 80-81





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## Behold the Pig of God

*Mystery of Christ's Sacrifice  
in the Context of Melanesia – Oceania<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction

An attempt is made in this article to expose and interpret the culture that evolves around the 'Pig,' its sacrifice, and the animal symbolism of the traditional communities of Oceania particularly the Melanesian traditional communities.<sup>2</sup> These island-cultures have a more fluid, less rigid orientation to the chiefly system than the Polynesian island groups, and embrace a diversity of language groups, with Papua New Guinea alone including more than 700 languages. Although Melanesian communities and their cultures are diverse, rich and complex, they commonly share the views of the pig as an emblem of religious significance.

The quest is to examine not only the values and functions that the pig plays in the life of these communities, but also how the pig's ritual sacrifice, its mystical potent as well as social and ethical implications undergird and /or even shape the values, attitudes and actions of the human communities.





In the process, the symbolism and theology surrounding the concept of 'Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God' will be challenged and critiqued from the point of view of the relationship between Gospel and Culture. The demands of relevancy, consistency, and effectiveness of the Gospel in relation to particular socio-historical contexts drive the traditional Christology of the Lamb of God to the background, while the dynamic relationship between the Gospel and Culture explicit in the 'Christology of the Pig of God' takes primacy.

## Pig Christology - Presuppositions

The central Christological questions in this exercise might be framed as follows: Can Jesus symbolically and /or metaphorically be portrayed as a Pig – a 'Perfect Pig' of God? Does the pig symbolism or animal representation fit appropriately with the character of Jesus as Christ? And how far can a pig and its sacrifice correlates with the sacrifice of Jesus as a Lamb of God? What are the implications be they actual and / or symbolic of pig sacrifice that could bear significant witnesses to the redemptive sacrifice of Christ?

To sketch and present an appropriate response to these queries, it is vital to revisit the indigenous religious traditions, uncovering the validity of the symbolic, metaphorical and animal significances of the pig, its actual sacrificial, redemptive, saving and transforming meanings and relevance to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This is with the hope that such an exercise is one way to enrich one's faith perceptions and experiences contextually.

Mindful of the sacrificial theories that surround the Christian teachings on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ,<sup>3</sup> an attempt is made in the end to draw some connecting links between the two traditions as a way to illustrate the process of accommodating and appropriating the Gospel message in discrete cultures.

If the Gospel is to address the various needs of communities with authenticity, it must take root and grow in a particular culture. The Good News must be accommodated and appropriated as an integral part of the value system, attitudes, and actions of the people of a given culture. Accordingly, artifacts or 'elements of culture will also influence the interpretation of the Gospel.' The sacred attachment of the Melanesians to pigs, for example, will lead to a very different interpretation of the story in the Gospel of Mark (Mk.1.20) where Jesus casts out a mob of demons into a herd of pigs.<sup>4</sup>

The basic assumptions for constructing this contextual dimension of Christology therefore are:

- ◆ The 'cultural valuation' of an animal depends on the community's experiences – the place of an animal in that community.
- ◆ The life of every creature is sacred – endowed with the divine.
- ◆ Animal sacrifices have transformational power in human communities.
- ◆ Animal life and symbolic signification must be respected as integral components of the life of the Cosmic Christ.

Being conscious of the deficiencies of viewing Christ as Pig - the Perfect Pig of God, our contextual exploration nonetheless has something to say, particularly for the reformulation of Christology in contexts.

## A Judeo-Christian View of the Pig

It is appropriate here to begin by reviewing the negative view of the pig in the Judeo-Christian tradition. There is no such thing as 'pig-love' in the Bible. For the Jews, Muslims and some Christians, a pig is a strange, filthy and unclean animal. Since it was a threat to the agricultural life of Ancient Near Eastern peoples, the pig was considered



useless and forbidden. Consumption of pork was taboo. The pig's wild behavior was thought to expose its true nature. And since it could not even clean itself, and continuously returned to its old ways, a pig was likened to a harlot (Prov.11.22) and a source of un-cleanliness as vividly presented in the story of the prodigal son. It was a valueless creature symbolic of filth and paganism (Is.65.4, 66.3).<sup>5</sup> A pig in this view is a most unfavorable animal, a creature hated and best ignored. Nothing is more insulting to many Jews, Muslims and some Christians even today than to be called by the name 'PIG.'

Yet could it be the case that cultural and religious biases have denied the pig its integrity as well as its great contribution to the process of life? Although the Judeo-Christian traditions have directly or indirectly devalued its significant contributions to the cosmic web of life, the fact remains that it is highly valued, loved and respected in some cultures, perhaps most significantly amongst the communities of Oceania, specifically in our case, the Melanesians.

## An Alternative View of the Pig

For an alternative view of the pig, we turn our attention then to Melanesia. Here the pig is the most highly valued creature and a sacred sacrificial creature in the Melanesian worldview. Of course the nature of their valuing and of humans' relationship to pigs depends on the social location of each community. The hunting or bush communities, for instance, highly value the wild pigs, whereas the more settled agrarian communities domesticate and keep pigs as cherished companions and as pets.

In some Melanesian communities, pigs are hand-fed and at times the young piglets are breastfed by women, when needed. This establishes intense relationships – known as 'pig-love' – not because of their 'commodity value' but because of their 'material value' that they possess on 'account of their intrinsic being.'<sup>6</sup> Pigs are usually named, some

with Christian names. The identification of pig-feeders with their pigs has led some to "compose special songs about (a pig's) life when it dies and to share a special bonding with the pig just before its death," through something akin to a 'last supper.'<sup>77</sup> Jolly cited by Miles, 3. See also Robert W. Williamson, "Religious and Cosmic Beliefs of Central Polynesia." (Cambridge: University Press, 1933), 121-126.

Pigs are especially earmarked for sacred rites and ceremonial festivities. The ceremonies that are associated with pigs, especially with pig sacrifice, have a crucial influence on unity or disunity in the community. They are also utilized to promote social standing and political rank. Pigs both hold "great symbolic import" in shaping the religious life of communities, and also "foster nationalistic, partisan and other political ends."<sup>78</sup>

In parts of Melanesia where the Big-man system<sup>9</sup> is operative, the whole ceremonial and ritual system revolves around pigs. The accumulation of pigs elevates one's social and political status. They are used as dowries for marriage, prizes paid in exchange for valuable artifacts, or to "ratify peace agreements between warring villages."<sup>10</sup> Traditional legal codes are established for their care and use.

In the island of Bougainville, for instance, there are about thirty five (35) key rules for Big-man. Out of these, more than twenty (20) revolve around the pig. Here are just a few examples:

Rule number

7. *When messengers sent to challenge someone with a feast, a pig is sent as the invitation.*
8. *At the birth of new pigs, you cannot do anything else but care for them.*
9. *Pigs must be fed well.*
10. *If hungry pigs break into gardens, you can be sued for damages.*
11. *A pig gone wild is a total loss – pigs must be fed and treated as members of the family.*
12. *You can use sorcery to drive a man's pig into the forest.*
13. *It is possible to steal a pig but, if caught, you will be punished.*



18. *Pork is eaten at all ceremonies.*

20. *To say "you have no pig" is an insult.*

35. *A feast giver must be enterprising and a shrewd buyer (of pigs). Everyone will respect that person as renowned.<sup>11</sup>*

These codes emphasize both the nurturing of pigs and their social, ceremonial, feasting, prestige and honor valuations. Codes related to pigs help to maintain kinship unity and harmony. Securing peace through reconciliation requires an offering or sacrifice of a pig. Hence the well-known saying: 'Slaughter and cook a pig, then we can sit down and talk peace.'<sup>12</sup> Other Melanesian sayings relate that pigs have living souls that accompany the spirits of the dead to the afterworld.

## Pig in the Clash of Worldviews

Before the arrival of the so-called enlightened discoverers, traders and missionaries, indigenous communities such as the Melanesians and other Pacific Islanders held to a worldview that was radically incompatible with the European/Western worldview. The presence of Caucasians amongst the local communities was in some ways liberating. However, their atomistic / mechanical views of nature, and their dichotomizing all of life into polarizing categories or polar opposites such as heaven and hell, saved and damned, enlightened and pagan, sacred and worldly, body and spirit, have negatively impacted on indigenous communities and their ways of life.

The Western worldview also included a hierarchy of value which placed humans above animals and ranked animals in their own pecking order, with some animals being superior to others, depending on their utilitarian worth in meeting humans' perceived needs. In this hierarchy, pigs were inferior creatures. Whatever worth they had was as a commodity for exchange. Even the early missionaries shared this view, and used the monetary proceeds from the sale of pig products for the furtherance of the Christian mission.

In an 'Account of a Voyage' of the early discoverers in the Pacific, one crew-member not only made a distinction between the native pigs and European lambs, but also linked the value of pigs to further European values. For example, he wrote that "... we all agreed, that a South Sea hog was ... inferior to an English lamb; their excellence is probably owing to their being kept up, and wholly fed upon vegetables."<sup>13</sup>

In other words, how well the animals are kept in pens (that is, domesticated) and fed (by Western standards) determines the values of creatures. It is humans' control over animals, especially objectionable animals like pigs, that defines their merit. All of this is in diametric opposition to the Melanesians' understanding of the place of animals in the cosmos.

The missionaries, anthropologists and ethnologists who have worked or carried out field researches in Melanesia have identified the ceremonial forms and ritual associations of the native communities as nature or animistic religions. Their records occasionally refer to these religions as founded on the belief in a 'mysterious Power' above and around the human community. This mysterious power is diffused in almost every part of nature, animate or inanimate. The indwelling of mysterious powers in natural phenomena and objects is well understood by human beings who live in close relations with the invisible agents.

The ever-presence of the divine in the natural world is a dynamic, ongoing encounter. The 'divine indwelling' in all of nature and life is unquestionable. All parts of the living cosmos relate and communicate with this authentic power that animates all. The natural world is approached with awe and respect, as it is perceived as filled with living agents of the divine. These living presences of the divine, or the power associated with them, are widely known throughout Oceania as *Mana* (sacred power). *Mana* is sustained by the *Tapu* system (sacred taboos that safeguard and preserve *mana*).

In the larger Melanesian religious worldview, the pig and its



sacrifice play a vital role in mending relations amongst the divine, human and the cosmic communities. The religious significance lies in the fact that it 'enables the human community to act in order to cope with life' and not so much 'for the people to be enriched intellectually.'<sup>14</sup> Such an indigenous religious belief is not only 'non-analytical' but deeply founded on the 'first hand experiences of the community. It is rooted in concrete knowledge' – from what the body imagines, feels, sees, hears, tastes, smells and so forth.<sup>15</sup>

Here nature and being are inseparable. Here participating in religious ceremonies means paying attention to the mystery with deep appreciation, affection and dynamic remembrance. Religiosity or spirituality teaches humility, awe and simplicity. It has a concrete collective ethics geared towards moral commitments and social responsibility. This ethics works to preserve and sustain communities and the web of life. It is always relational - it exists as a community in communion that survives on mending and upholding the interrelatedness of all life.

## Melanesian Religion and Pig Sacrifice

In a cultural context where nature daily provides human needs all year round, human aspirations naturally focus on 'fertility and growth.' Community life and survival is at the core of religious understanding and commitments. In Oceania this was closely related to the phenomenon of Creation, and traditional agrarian communities of Oceania all acknowledged the "presence of a universal God in *Lagi* – Sky or Heaven."<sup>16</sup> They shared in common the veneration of the Sun as the ultimate Deity, the Creator.

Regarded as a medium of energy, light and life, this great phenomenon generated and directed the activities of every creaturely being from birth to death. The possibility of rebirth and regeneration were determined by the circulating power and dynamic movements of

the Sun.<sup>1717</sup> Johnston, 29f. When the body dies, it was either buried or cremated and the soul or spirit makes a heavenly journey. The ancestors believed that the idea of journey to the 'West' coincides with that of the dead following the steps of their parent ancestors – Sun / Moon – as s/he goes to his / her home on the horizon to rest. The tradition of the 'path of the soul to the West' was shared in common by the people who believed in the divinity of the Sun and the Moon. Going 'West' in this context simply means 'going down,' awaiting 'going up' again.

All animating beings naturally followed the cyclical path of the Sun – sunrise, sunset, sunrise – symbolic of the path of life, death, and regeneration.

Some tribal communities in Oceania (e.g. Samoans / Polynesian) are fond of calling themselves 'Children of the Sun.' These communities claim the Sun as the Great Ancestor. Everything in the immediate surrounding – every created being have been perceived as a descendent of the Sun.

In contexts where the chiefly system traditionally managed the community (the norm in most of Oceania), the sacred chiefs were the highest manifestation of the Supreme Deity (Sun God) and were respected as the child of a mysterious energy and light. Sacred ceremonies and offerings connected with the deity were held from birth to death, and the "tomb became the place at which to hold religious ceremonies and make offerings connected with Sun-worship."<sup>18</sup> The utmost duty of the human community was to propitiate the Sun as the fertility of the earth depended on it. Besides the (relatively rare) sacrifice of human beings, pigs were sacrificed as the 'highest gifts that earthly beings could give to ensure the continuation of life.'<sup>19</sup>

A Vanuatu (formerly the New Hebrides) tradition relates that the pig was offered for sacrifice to the Sun because it was the animal born directly out of this great light. Thus the pig was a creature of mysterious light. It is a custom in other parts of Vanuatu that pig skulls were often preserved and actually put in the grave with important men, and a fire





kindled over the grave to ensure a safe return to the Sun. There is a connection of light to this mysterious creature, the pig.<sup>20</sup>

Sacrifices of pigs are therefore held with the understanding that nothing more than a bleeding heart or soul of the pig can "give the Sun a new lease on life."<sup>21</sup> Since the Sun had released 'a certain portion of (its) vital substance to give warmth and life and fertility to the earth, it was necessary to give back to it some important vital substance from this world.' The offering of fertile things such as pigs is to make sure that the earth is not only continuously fertile, but that the temporary benefit of a good harvest can be secured. Such powers are given back to the Sun so that it might not cease to shine.

Another tradition states that the pig (or boar) is the 'great emblem of fertility' and it must be sacrificed to feed the Sun. Once the Sun absorbs the pig's fertile powers, it becomes re-energized and even more capable of producing fertility for the earth.<sup>22</sup> In this process, it is believed that the absorption of the suffering life of the animal into the divine life produces greater potentialities for sustaining the life of the cosmos.

Many communities of Oceania recognize pigs not only as an animate 'symbol of fertility' but also as a 'symbol of purity.' Besides its being slaughtered during rituals of sacrifice, cooked, cut into pieces and feasted on, its blood is often used for purification purposes.

A Polynesian tribe for instance, uses the pig's blood to purify the ground if they think some crime against the gods has been committed. The idea of the redemption of the crimes of human beings is intimately related to the violation of the land's integrity by way of breaking its sacred taboos. Human crime boils down to the defilement of the land. When people commit sins, the land, and indeed the whole cosmos suffer, as humanity and land and nature are inseparable. To redeem the land or cosmos, therefore, human beings must give back to it its due with honor and respect. To sprinkle the land with the blood of the pig is symbolic of giving back the land what it is owed. This is a way of healing the wounds and simultaneously restoring the fertility of the land. This recalls

the indigenous understanding that human beings do not own or even control the land or nature, but nature owns them. In this sense, redemption is not only reciprocal but also inclusively cosmic. For the traditional indigenous mind, the entire community, including the land and all of nature, must be cleansed of all defilement as there is no restoration of human wholeness once land or cosmos is polluted.

A distinction can be drawn here between the emphasis on the lamb's blood shed and applied to the door posts as the ancient Israelites were commanded, an idea which is translated by the New Testament into the language of baptism. Here the believer is baptized through the blood of Jesus, the Lamb.

#### Community – Identification and Transformation

A consideration of the pig sacrifice, how it relates to the centrality of the community and the Melanesian 'identity and being,' presuppose several foundational statements:

1. The pig and the symbolisms that revolve around it has informed a deep sense of *identification* for Melanesians – with the animal, each other in the cosmic community, and with the spirits (the transcendent).
2. The enactment of ceremonies and rituals of pig sacrifice regenerates the community; it is a transformational experience, leading to concrete commitments to community life.
3. The emphasis on feasting associated with pig sacrifice is centered in the communal sharing in the mystery of fertility and life. It results in a theology of celebration.

The deep sense of identification associated with pig sacrifice builds strong inter-connected and inter-dependent ties in the personal, social, spiritual and cosmic fabric of life. Identification allows the community to embrace their common identity and affirm their sense of unity and belonging. This identification presupposes the Mystery of Communion – a community in communion.



A lack of such identification means 'not belonging,' being isolated, unknown or excluded from the experience of living in relationship. It means alienation that can lead either to the experience of neutrality or an existence just for one's own sake and a feeling of just doing something for the sake of doing it. This experience can also lead to extinction or being worthless and meaningless.

In terms of the transformational aspect of pig sacrifice, the community's association with the pig and participation in its sacrifice calls for new commitments in and for the community. This sense of commitment is not only empowered by the mystery of the life that has been sacrificed, but also by a strong desire to mend and nurture relationships, human and natural. This strong urge and openness to the mystery of life demonstrates a yearning for reconciliation – to oneself and cosmic others.

Pig culture and pig sacrifice still has a strong reconciliatory power in the life of traditional Melanesian communities. A territorial dispute between a Melanesian community in West Papua and an Australian Aboriginal community in nearby Australian territory was recently resolved through a peace treaty, which was signed in an Anglican Church,' in the presence of a Catholic bishop, Anglican priests, and what a newspaper article called 'priests of culture from Melanesia.' In this reconciliation rite a pig was offered as a sacrifice. The news article stated that the:

...participants proclaimed their commitment when the head of the pig, the blood sacrifice, was placed on the high altar of the church. Though the pig has never had a place in Judeo-Christian history, the employment of the Melanesian ***cultural mechanisms rather than traditional Western signatures*** endowed a level of understanding of the unwritten contract that was not lost on the signatories....In the rich land of symbolism, the pig sacrificed, created [and reopened] a passage [for reconciliation].<sup>23</sup>

As the Melanesians sailed back across the narrow strait to West Papua, they sang, raised their flag stained with the pig's blood and took with them the remains of the blood sacrifice.<sup>24</sup> Is this not an effective in-culturation and/or accommodation of the Gospel?

The preceding discussion leads us, then, to a consideration of the *Christological mystery and the significance of the Pig sacrifice*. The fact is that the power of pig symbolism and its sacrifice is still an inspiring force in the faith of Melanesian people, including many Christian Melanesians. It has the power to renew and mend relationships. It is a channel for a 'Christic-spark' or a 'Christ-emanating light' that moves the hearts of persons and communities to mend relationships and to embrace and appreciate the gifts of others.

Feasting on the sacrificed pigs is, indeed, a participation in the life of the divine. It empowers participants to be in unity and effect reconciliation. It is interesting to note that, in this sacrificial celebration, every member of the community has his or her share of the sacrificed pig. This is certainly the intention of the Christian celebration of the Eucharist, and yet certain of our church traditions reserve more of the elements for ordained priests, and entail a pecking order regarding who gets served first.



## Connections and Disconnections in Christological Understandings

If we are to build connecting links or dialogues between the ways of understanding and constructing diverse approaches to Christology, a rediscovery of the manifestations and revelations of the Cosmic Christ in any culture is essential. It is the 'mystery of Christ,' the 'Logos' or 'God-incarnate' which is the common ground of all historical and cultural Christological traditions. No tradition can claim a complete grasp of the fullness of this mystery. However, 'each tradition has its own distinctive experience of the divine mystery or the mystery of God in Christ that they can share with others.'<sup>25</sup> This same mystery is manifested in the traditions of Melanesian Christians who have been devoted to the mystery of Christ, revealed in the power of fertility, community welfare and the sacredness of all creation. Yet their authentic experience of the Christ, which has many potent points of connection with the sacredness of the pig, has been undermined by the imported Christology/ies that have been propounded by the Western church traditions. Such Christology/ies have become the norm in Melanesia as in the rest of Oceania.

The mainstream Western Christian tradition has been obsessed with parochial anthropocentric views of Jesus as the Christ. This Christological formulation has been most influenced by the thought of the early church fathers [who themselves had a strong Aristotelian influence], in particular, St. Anselm, with his understanding of the 'God-man' relationship.

The anthropocentric focus of traditional Christology is reinforced by the Enlightenment's search for the historical Jesus, which has carried down to the post-modern age. In all these developments, the meaning and effectiveness of God's redeeming and saving activity are reduced to the personal level. The human being as God's agent becomes the sole vehicle to redeem and save humanity and creation. Only in and through Jesus' sacrifice are believers and the whole world saved.

On the one hand, this understanding of Christ's sacrifice as human-centered is appreciated, in the sense that it is a gift for humanity, once and for all. It puts a stop to any other form of sacrifice and thus liberated other creatures from the necessity of sacrifice. The larger reality, however, is that all of life is inter-dependent. If the sacrifice of Jesus is restricted to a one-time act on behalf of humans, it does not reach far enough to the whole of the cosmos. Such a view makes Jesus' sacrifice bounded and exclusive. Its exclusivity consists in the fact that the ongoing sacrifice of other entities – including creatures and nature – is ignored and deemed worthless.

If there is to be any hope for the whole Creation, the meaning of Jesus' life and sacrifice must be reformulated to embrace the Cosmic Christ. In this Christology, every life matters, not only human life but, **all of life**. The Cosmic Christ is the incarnation of the Logos in Jesus. The Logos is the title that was applied to Jesus during the 4<sup>th</sup> Century. The idea of Jesus as Logos or the Cosmic Christ gradually got lost as the church historically developed.<sup>26</sup>

The 'God-man' focus of redemption and salvation as traditionally understood by the Church, therefore, needs to be replaced by a larger focus, one that embraces the lives of other creatures and the whole cosmos. Here all beings are seen as inclusively interacting and participating in Christ's saving activity. This is one way to discover anew the sense of the mystery and presence of Christ in the life of each and every being and community. It is time to rediscover the Cosmic Christ and reawaken to the divine mystery of life.

The Cosmic Christ tradition has never completely died out, of course. Teilhard de Chardin for instance, states that "Christ is not just an anthropological phenomenon with significance for humanity, but Christ is also a cosmic event with significance for the planet."<sup>27</sup> Matthew Fox, a great advocate of the medieval mystic Meister Eckhart, asserts that 'Christ is in the very structure and life of the cosmos. Christ was there in the beginning when the universe was conceived, and it is still present in all of life's nurturing and sustaining processes.'<sup>28</sup> All of life



is to be counted and identified with the life of God in Christ that saves and sustains.<sup>29</sup>

If the very life of a pig, in its re-creating, redemptive, reconciling, re-uniting symbolism legitimately sustains and empowers the Melanesian community, then the pig is also valuable in relation to the salvation activity of God in Christ. It reveals to Melanesians the mystery of communion, with others, the cosmos, and the interpenetrating divine.

## Concluding Remarks

John the Baptist announced Jesus *not as the Word of God incarnate or the Christ of God but simply as Lamb*. This says something unique about the cultural context, particularly the animal associations of the community of his time. As his was a time of changes and transitions, he was calling for repentance, the turning around of the mind and the whole life of a believer (Gk - *metanoia*). This echoes Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, dying to oneself by identifying with the life offered up, and experiencing a new life in its fullness, the life of resurrection. His was a call to be cleansed of the old and live a new humanity, a life of wellness and abundance. How this new life is worked out, however, assumes different forms in differing contexts.

Contextually, one can say that Jesus was likened to a lamb in the Jewish culture and their world of ideological values. The lamb was well cared for, nurtured and slaughtered for the Passover meal. It is likened to Jesus in that of his meekness, tender and of his innocent suffering.

To reiterate the point that was raised in the beginning, it should be critically emphasized that a theology fitting to a particular context has to be formulated out of the needs of a particular community. Theology should aim at making the Gospel message 'relevant and meaningful' in every cultural situation. Today, it is inevitable that traditional theologies constructed in different cultural and historical

contexts do not effectively address the living realities that the Melanesian and the communities of Oceania face. The formulation of a relevant Theology, in this case, Christology, has to be constructed from the experiences and the traditions of the living communities in Oceania – as in every other culture.

This exploration is also a challenge to Biblical study. The text; ‘Behold the lamb of God...’ has been taken for granted and universally adhered to, without a critique of its relevancy for cultural contexts which know nothing of lamb or sheep and the culture that evolves around it. Referring to Jesus as simply the Lamb of God has been a universal norm as if *the only norm*. Jesus as Lamb of God has relevance in the thought forms and cultures of communities in the Middle East, Europe and America.

In Oceania, and other cultural settings, this is not the case. The cultural contrasts and the diversity of associations therefore call for more contextual readings of the Bible. If John the Baptist had lived in one of the islands in Oceania 2000 years ago, and had encountered the Christ walking by, he would surely have exclaimed, “Behold, the Pig of God that takes away the sins of the world” (St. John.1.29).

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The article is a revised version of a public lecture by Rev. Dr. Ama'amalele Tofaeono Siolo II, Scholar-in-Residence Fellow at Union Theological Seminary / Columbia University, New York – USA, April 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Melanesia refers to the island groups in the western and southern regions of the South Pacific with a shared ethnic background and cultural orientation, including the nations of the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, New Caledonia and Papua New Guinea.

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed reading on the theories of Christ's sacrifice, see Horace Bushnell, *The Vicarious Sacrifice*. (New York: The Regina Press, 1975), 39-43.





<sup>4</sup> Phillip Gibbs, "Transforming Humanity from Within: In-culturation as a Challenge for Evangelization in Papua New Guinea." <http://www.sedos.org/english/gibbs.html>, 19.

<sup>5</sup> Cited from the Encyclopedia of Religions, <http://www.zoomnet.net/~bbratt/jewenpig.html> (3/3/2004), 1ff. and J. H. Kellogg, "The Scientific View of the Hog." [http://www.zoomnet.net/~bbrett/view\\_hog.html](http://www.zoomnet.net/~bbrett/view_hog.html) 1-4.

<sup>6</sup> William F. S. Miles, Pigs, Politics and Social Change in Vanuatu. [www.PSYETA.org](http://www.PSYETA.org), Vol 5 No. 2, 1977: 2-5.

<sup>7</sup> Jolly cited by Miles, 3. See also Robert W. Williamson, "Religious and Cosmic Beliefs of Central Polynesia." (Cambridge: University Press, 1933), 121-126.

<sup>8</sup> Miles, 2. The author was also told that in the traditional cultural symbolism and expression of the Fijians, purity (in terms of virginity of the women) was signified by the ways the pigs were slaughtered. For example, if the inner guts of a pig are taken off from an open cut in the stomach, it simply implies that the lady is still a virgin. If the guts are taken out from the bottom part, it simply indicates that the pride has already lost her purity and/or virginity. Losing one's purity and/or virginity was a cause of shame, guilt and disappointment of immediate families and villages. This could consequently lead to communal conflicts. The divorce of a couple and tribal warfare were inevitable.

<sup>9</sup> The Big-man system is a more loosely structured chiefly system than that in Polynesia, in which the Big-man is often selected on merit rather than his role being hereditary.

<sup>10</sup> Miles, 2.

<sup>11</sup> Consult Website Article on; "A Look at a Bigman: Bougainvillan. n.d. 1-5.

<sup>12</sup> Cite from A. Tofaeono's 'Christology in Context' Class; presentation and sharing of a Solomon Islander student during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Term, (Suva: Pacific Theological College. 2002).

<sup>13</sup> John Hawkesworth, "An Account of the Voyage Undertaken by the Order of his Present Majesty: Discovery in the Southern Hemisphere." Vol III. (Perth: R. Morison and Sons, 1769), 20.

<sup>14</sup> Allusion is given here to the Durkheimian and others' (e.g. Bronislaw K. Malinowski) sociological views on religion and culture. For detailed reading, see Ama'amalele Tofaeono, *An Eco-Theology – Aiga: The Household of Life*. (Erlange: Erlangen Verlag, 2000), 26ff.

<sup>15</sup> Reference can be made here to Joseph Campbell's views on Myths and Indigenous Religions as recorded in his Interview with Bill Moyers. See Joseph Campbell. *The Power of Myth: With Bill Moyers*. (London: Anchor Books, 1988).

<sup>16</sup> T. R. St. Johnston, *The Islanders of the Pacific*. (London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd, 1921), 29.

<sup>17</sup> Johnston, 29f. When the body dies, it was either buried or cremated and the soul or spirit makes a heavenly journey. The ancestors believed that the idea of journey to the 'West' coincides with that of the dead following the steps of their parent ancestors – Sun / Moon - as s/he goes to his / her home on the horizon to rest. The tradition of the 'path of the soul to the West' was shared in common by the people who believed in the divinity of the Sun and the Moon. Going 'West' in this context simply means 'going down,' awaiting 'going up' again.

<sup>18</sup> Johnston, 34.

<sup>19</sup> Johnston, 34.

<sup>20</sup> Johnston, 35.

<sup>21</sup> Johnston, 34.

<sup>22</sup> Johnston, 182.

<sup>23</sup> Louise Byrne, "Sanap Wantaim: Melanesian West Papua." Globalism Institute, RMIT University, n.d., 2.

<sup>24</sup> Byrne, 1.

<sup>25</sup> See Joseph Hough Jr. "A Call for a New Reformation." Religious Socialism: The Journal for the People of Faith and Socialism. Vol. 27 Issue 3 and 4 (2003): 1-6. For example, the Orthodox community has its emphasis on the Cosmic Christ whereas the Roman Catholicism places the humanity and passion of Christ at the center of their faith encounters and experiences. The Lutherans concentrate on the redeeming grace of Christ as 'mystery' while the Calvinism essentially focuses on the power of Christ as revealed Word.

<sup>26</sup> Based on Jaroslav Pelican's ideas [a church historian / theologian] cited by Matthew Fox. The Coming of the Cosmic Christ. (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1988), 77.

<sup>27</sup> Fox, pg?

<sup>28</sup> Fox, 137.

<sup>29</sup> The idea of Christ as cosmic is featured extensively in the search of religious and scientific thinkers who are engaged to build dialogue between the natural sciences and religions. See for example, the ideas exposed by the Feminist, Process and Eco-theologians.

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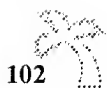
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## Book Review

AIDS - Meeting the Challenge

*Data, Fact, Background*

Weinreich, S. & C. Benn, WCC Publications, Geneva, 2004

*Reviewed by Kafoa Solomone*

This is the World Council of Churches' publication of two German medical doctors' work first published in 2003 in Germany. The German title "AIDS – Eine Krankheit verändert die Welt...", the second part of the title may be roughly translated "A Disease Changes the World..." The German title seems to focus more on the havoc wreaked by this disease throughout the world today, while the English title seems to look towards those who will be helped by the book – the churches, not just to be informed about the disease but also to address the problem of this disastrous epidemic.

The book is very informative about AIDS in the different aspects of the disease. It moves from a precise medical description of the disease that can be understood by both a lay person and a more technically or academically oriented reader. The book has data, graphs, survey results, predictions based on the present data, and so forth. It has a wealth of information that can be of value to anyone who wants to know anything about AIDS. The authors carried out studies of the disease in the different continents.

The book has 19 sections. Each of which deals with specific issue. Sections 1 and 2 deal with the nature of the disease and its transmission as well as the data on its worldwide spread. Sections 3-6 deal with the vulnerable groups, how the disease is spread, and the categories of



people infected and what needs to be done in each of these categories of people particularly for children and the youth.

The role of socio-economic contexts is dealt with in sections 7-9. The second half, 10-19, deals with people living with the disease, prevention, treatment, as well as the cost of available drugs, and international community's role in the fight against AIDS.

How culture plays a role in the dealing with the issue as well as the Churches' role in cooperation with others in educating, caring and being responsive in general to the needs of its people in their time of need. The book is tidily formatted. The reader is helped with the "pull-out" phrases or quotations on the side of the text. The graphs, charts, tables, etc. are clear and well placed throughout the book. The sections are brief but condensed. It does not waste words or space and it is clearly printed. The literature list at the end of the book is helpful for those who want further information.

This book is recommended to both the more interested and those who care to be informed about this vicious phenomenon that plagues our contemporary world.



## Book Review

FROM EAST AND WEST

*Rethinking Christian Mission*

Chalice Press, St. Louis, Missouri 2004

ISBN 0-8272-1033-7

*Reviewed by Tessa Mackenzie*

The title of this book, *From East and West – Rethinking Christian Mission*, reflects the author's intention to present the ideas that he has developed over his years of experience and service in ecumenism, and his desire that these ideas be put into practice. Originally from Sri Lanka, D. Preman Niles' ideas were formulated through years of experience in ecumenical theological education and through working with ecumenical organizations – the Christian Conference of Asia, the World Council of Churches, and the Council for World Mission. In this book he not only draws together insights he has articulated through numerous writings over the years, he relates his story, and it is through story telling that he makes known to us his ideas and gives them practical validity.

His work naturally brought to him an awareness of the plurality of cultures, within the world wide Christian Church – a fact about which some old-style missionary bodies were in denial. He saw the need for the Church to give equal place to all peoples and cultures.

He goes on beyond the plurality of cultures to address the plurality of religions and the growing realization within the Church that there is validity and truth to be found, which was ignored and denied in the past. D. Preman Niles sees that this calls for a new approach. The

Christian mission is as important as ever and he confirms that those who have been involved in inter-religious relations and dialogue believe to be the true mission of the church – namely to show forth Christ, rather than to go head-hunting.

Through his searching for ways to address the tension between the mission of the church and dialogue with people of other faiths, D. Preman Niles has been led to articulate a new vision for mission. For him, people are the most important factor, people take precedence over sets of beliefs. The Church must give equal value within itself to the plurality of peoples from all races, groups, cultures and languages before it can present a meaningful message to the modern, pluralistic world. His vision is that the church is “to be God’s people in the midst of all God’s peoples”, to be a community within the wider community which is a channel of God’s peace, and which is challenged “to incarnate the love ethic of Jesus”, for the greater good of society.





## Book Review

### THE ORTHODOX CHURCHES IN A PLURALISTIC WORLD

*An Ecumenical Conversation*

Clapsis Emmanuel, Ed. WCC Publications, Geneva, 2004

ISBN 2-8254-1397-6

*Reviewed by Tessa Mackenzie*

This book which is also published by Holy Cross Orthodox Press, contains papers presented at a Conference held in 2002 in the United States. The contributions come from a range of scholars, not all of them members of the Orthodox Church, and is well described as a conversation. These writings contain a variety of valuable insights and ideas, and reveal aspects of pluralism that are important for dealing realistically with the major issue of globalization.

Globalization is sometimes categorized as an evil to be overcome. This ecumenical collection of papers contains riches to help address pluralism constructively. The topics range over issues which are especially relevant for our island societies, such as cultural identity, nationalism, ethnic conflict, violence, forgiveness and reconciliation, and human rights. Pacific theologians, Church leaders and Christian readers should not imagine that the name "Orthodox" in the title renders the book irrelevant. There is much that is exciting and challenging to be found within the 220 pages.

# Pacific Journal of Theology

## Policy Statement

The Pacific Journal of Theology is published twice yearly by the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools. It seeks to stimulate theological thinking and writing by Christians living in or familiar with the South Pacific, and to share these reflections with church and theological education communities, and with all who want to be challenged to reflect critically on their faith in changing times. Opinions and claims made by contributors to the Journal are solely those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect those of the Editorial Board or the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools.

The Editorial Board welcomes various kinds of writing which express an emerging Pacific theology. These may include:

- ◆ Original articles in the theological disciplines;
- ◆ Articles relating theological thinking to Pacific cultures, contemporary issues, and other academic disciplines;
- ◆ Helpful material for pastors and church workers (liturgical, pastoral, educational);
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- ◆ Notes and reviews of books which are relevant for Pacific Christians;
- ◆ Information about ongoing research in the theological disciplines in the Pacific.



## Notes for Contributors

The Editorial Board will consider for publication all manuscripts of scholarly standard and in keeping with the overall policy of this Journal. It is recommended that articles should be approximately 4,320 words long. The Editorial Board reserves the right to accept or reject, and to edit all articles submitted for publication. Poetry, photographs, black and white drawings are also welcome. Articles should be clearly typed in double spacing on one side of the paper only. Any sources quoted or paraphrased should be listed in endnotes and a bibliography at the end of the article, including author, title, city, publisher and date of publication. Please include brief autobiographical data.

## Language

The Editorial Board will accept articles in French and Pacific languages with an abstract in English language.









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